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SOME TALK OF ALEXANDER

SOME TALK OF ALEXANDER

A REVUE, WITH INTERLUDES IN
THE ANTIQUE MODE

BY
JAMES BRIDIE

WITH A MAP



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TO
ALEC GLEN

“Truly wonderful are the ways of Providence!”

GEORGE BORROW

“I take for my text a beautiful, but little-known passage from the Talmud :

I will arise and gird up my lions—I mean loins—and go ; yea, I will get me out of the land of my fathers which is in Ben Ramon, even unto Edom and the valley of Kush and the cities about Laban to the uttermost ends of the earth.

“There is something about foreign travel, my dear brethren, which seems, as it were, a positive physical necessity to our eager and high-wrought generation. . . .”

Lambkin's Sermon.

PREFACE

PREFACES should be written, in a spirit of High Emprise, when the Author first takes up his pen ; while his pages are yet virgin ; while the possibility that he may perhaps write a Masterpiece still beckons him on ; and they should stay inviolate till the Book is published, and be printed at the end, so that the reader may say, " Thus and thus the Author intended to write, and this he intended to convey, but alas ! he was subject to the common disabilities of mankind. Never mind. All effort is noble in itself, and this work which I have just read appears undoubtedly to have been an Effort."

When a preface is written, as this is being written, when the work is nearing its end, it cannot fail to be dark with disillusionment and oily with excuse. The satisfaction felt in having almost completed an immense piece of manual labour can only partially illuminate it. " Why then ", you exclaim, " write a preface at

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all? " Because the Author can never be sure of having sufficiently explained himself in the body of the Book, and besides, he must have somewhere to condone his shortcomings and to call upon everybody to admire his excellences, lest any, perchance, be missed in hurried reading.

This Book is intended to be an account of what happened to a quiet, respectable practitioner of Medicine during the years 1917-19. It does not pretend to compete with those Books of Travel produced by men (yea, and by women also), who, of their own free-will, or driven by the red Gods, have wandered into unknown lands, keen-eyed, alert, determined to let nothing pass till it be fully savoured and recorded for others to savour. The voyage of this doctor was none of his seeking. Some spark of a Henty-fed boyhood led him to go to France early in the War, but long ere he took ship for the East that spark had died. His main concern was to stay away from home till the Thing had blown over, and then to get home as quickly as possible. He shared this attitude with ninety-nine hundredths of the Army of the Orient. Yet he, with many another poor honest man, was cast into a series of Arabian Nights and Days; pulled, pushed, and carried through fantastic mediæval scenes; and afflicted with that waking dream state in which the only recognized method of preserving

sanity was to treat the whole business as a silly joke, and to wear that perpetual smirk which, I fear, even at this remote date, is all too evident in the succeeding pages. The only reticulum in this haphazard collection of episodes is the curious dream atmosphere that the Author shared with the other shadows who mow and gibber in this Book. These shadows are composite caricatures of real people, but then so were we all in those days. If they recognize themselves here, they are more fortunate than the Author, in that, as he turns over the memories of the five short years ago, he has difficulty in recognizing himself.

Part of this Book was written for fun, and in the wish to transfix dead butterfly thoughts with the collector's pin. Why the other part was written I have no idea. When I read it through I cannot conceive how any man or woman could feel better informed or morally uplifted through reading it. Perhaps it was written because the most glowing and glorious printed words in the whole world are those of which one has written the manuscript oneself. I do not know.

J. B.

February, 1926.

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I

THE OCEAN

CHAPTER I

OLD WOMAN, OLD WOMAN !

ON the nineteenth of March 1917, Skipper and I were cruising about London (that great city) looking for an insurance office we had heard of. We were bound away South and East. Skipper was for the Cape and I was for Mesopotamia, and to Skipper's cunning mind it seemed essential that we should insure ourselves and our baggage against the manifold perils of the deep. At that date one reached the Persian Gulf by sailing half-way to America, down to Cape Colony, round to Natal, past Madagascar, and into Bombay. This was for fear of submarines. We were to sail in a long-drawn line of five with a grand old ship called

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the *Highflyer* as escort. In spite of this, Skipper thought we should insure, and he knew of an office, but where it could be found he was not so certain. After an hour we decided on a taxicab and to trust to the driver. A light drizzle was falling, and there was nobody at all in London but ourselves and an Old Woman, who walked swiftly fifty yards ahead of us. She was dressed in a rusty brown, and her yellow-grey hair straggled horribly under her flat bonnet. She turned round and looked at us, and she had an evil eye. I said as much to Skipper, but he did not pay any attention. With Skipper "Once thought on, once decided upon," and he was keeping a sage weather eye lifted for a taxicab.

At last one appeared at the end of a grey street vista, and Skipper stepped into the fairway and waved his stick, but the car stopped fifty yards ahead and whirled about with an exultant clatter, and into it nimbly leapt the Old Woman. Away they went, taxi and Old Woman, and I think her wicked eye looked once at us through the little square window at the back of the cab. I told Skipper what I thought, and he grunted courteously.

Up at Fort George, where I had been doing a fortnight's sick duty, and where I had written a short poem containing the following lines :

OLD WOMAN, OLD WOMAN ! 3

*Stiff Brandenburgers—Cockney marionettes
Strut to the tap of a long dead drum . . .
The Bloody Butcher from his Bastion
Frowns on the sullen Firth that frowns again. . . .*

Up at Fort George on the far Moray Firth I bought a penny book on how to tell Fate by the cards. While the great winds blustered round the barrack and the dreary gulls turned and squawked about the chimneys, I told my own fortune by candle-light and it has all come true. The ace of diamonds came where it could only mean a letter and a sudden journey ; and next morning a letter lay in the anteroom warning me that my passage was booked for thousands of miles away, and signed by a friend I had at Court. I told Skipper of this, and of an evil old woman who turned up nine places from my card in the nine-pointed star.

“ I think that must be the Old Woman ”, I said.

“ Well, if we find this — insurance place, it will probably mean that we lose our money ”, said Skipper.

We found the insurance place on foot, and spent some pounds—wasted, as it proved, for we lost neither our lives nor our baggage that trip.

We went for luncheon to a restaurant, walking all the way and ill-tempered at the expense Skipper had put us to, and we went to the

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severely plain upstairs restaurant to find it full of eaters and jostling waiters. The place was doing excellent business and was full of noise and crowd in its pandemoniacal fashion. A waiter hurrying near us let a neatly balanced beautiful lobster mayonnaise slip from the top of a pile of plates he was carrying, to glissade to the floor near Skipper's spurs.

"DIEU CROIT QUE DIRE!" said the head waiter, tearing his long black curly hair, and dashing in to take control of the situation. Then, like a haven in a troubled sea, I saw the little table where I always try to sit in that restaurant on the few occasions on which I visit London, and there were two vacant seats at it. I gave a glad cry, but all too soon. Like the tragic fellow in Lewis Carroll's poems, I looked again and saw . . .

. . . THE OLD WOMAN, THAT BUBBLE OF THE EARTH, APPEAR FROM NOWHERE, SIT DOWN AT MY TABLE AND BECOME SURROUNDED AS IF BY—NAY, UNDOUBTEDLY BY MAGIC, WITH EATABLES AND A LITTLE BOTTLE OF BEAUNE!

Skipper and I sat us sadly down at a corner and the head waiter provided for us by pushing back silver-plated dishes and cruets. We felt Fate. The luncheon, however, was good, and as we sat in the train bowling towards Exeter, we hoped that we were leaving witches, warlocks, ghoulies, elves, and fays behind in this grey-green

island, whereon the sun never shines. Devonshire was dark velvet green slashed with scarlet and was so like a dream of the unknown land I had many times as a child, that my hair stood on end.

The Unknown Land was reached by a leaky boat rowed on a long lake, sometimes a foot deep and often as deep as hell, and with great shadows across it and little tangled islands.

After twelve days' easy rowing, for there was no wind on the lake, we came to a shingly beach, over which ran a tiny river from between tall grey cliffs. We pulled and pushed the boat upstream, past the cliffs, along a shelving valley and into the Unknown Land—which was Devonshire, a place I had never seen with waking eyes till this May morning during the War.

After Exeter, at a place called Milton Abbot, I looked out of the window and saw the Old Woman on the platform. She had just got out of the train, and was collecting her luggage, which consisted of five black boxes like coffins. I could not help wondering why she got out at Milton Abbot, and whether the virtue that seemed inherent in the name was destroyed by the apposition of the solid clerical title to the name of the great Puritan who invented Satan. I never saw the Old Woman again till by mad and exciting routes I reached Baku, but I re-

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membered at Milton Abbot where I had seen her before.

In the North British Hotel in Edinburgh it was my privilege to lunch with a lord. I was dressed at the time in that great leveller, drab ; which in the tented field, in hotels, and in H.M. prisons, makes Lords and Commons equal if they have but the same number of stars on their cuffs. The lord and I had not much to talk about, as it is not polite to be informative to strangers, but to look for subjects of common interest and knowledge, so that neither may leave the conference wiser or more humiliated than when he sat down. We had therefore to turn our attention to the other guests in the hotel. It was during a cast around for salient features that the lord said to me :

“ Who is the long-toothed old darling over there by the mantelpiece ? She seems to enjoy her oats all right.”¹

The long-toothed old darling was a very yellow

¹ Lords often talk in this pleasant, airy fashion at mealtimes. I remember dining in his dug-out with a lord—not far from Arras it was—and the little acetylene table-lamp began to fade and die away ; whereupon the lord said to his batman : “ Wooley, it might be a good idea to see if the lamp is full before the doctor and I sit down to dinner. You know the story of the ten virgins . . . or, didn’t I ever tell you that one ? ”

lady dressed in brown, and I am sure it was she who tried in her feeble old way to prevent Skipper and me from going across a quarter of the world. She may have thought that I was the lord.

Skipper told me, to cheer me up, about how he once travelled as an apprentice in a windjammer, and how once the apprentices ate some porridge that had been spilled on the deck on its way aft from the galley, and how the cook was brutally maltreated by the captain one day, and how the crew mutinied, and how Skipper drifted to a ranch and was a cowboy for six months, and later found himself in San Francisco, and how he heard a voice from on high hailing him—"Hello Boko!" and then there was a shower of billsticker's paste; and how, looking up, he saw the mate of his old ship pasting up a large bill telling how a professor cured men.

So the time passed happily till we reached Plymouth.

The next day the sun was trying to shine, and soldiers in topees and serge were being pushed abroad the transport. They had dull, wondering faces, like cattle. I was berthed, not with the Skipper, but with a Regular R.A.M.C. officer called Ambrose, who was a saturnine man with large feet, a small head, and sensitive-looking nostrils. And in due time we cast off, and slid imperceptibly out into Plymouth Sound.

CHAPTER II

AFRICA

WE sailed on and on till we came to a great curious, flat country made of mists and tree-tops and distances, and there we threw down our anchor beneath a flaming sky ; and in terrible bands of purple and gold and orange and crimson and dark green, the night came down and we slept. In the morning we woke to find our vessel moving by long, sloping wooded shores on which were little groups of still people ; some naked and some in shirts, and so we came to Freetown, all set about with bluff hills. A horrid little train crawled up one, like a centipede.

Some of us, open-mouthed, and balancing unfamiliar pith helmets on our heads, rowed ashore through the diving blackamoors and noisy fruiterers. A boat with a huge sail and a picnic party of woollyheads almost sent us to our graves. Our ferryman stood up on the thwarts and shouted in a terrible voice : " O, you bloody boatman ; what you try for do ? " But we landed among the stinks and savagery and make-believe and splendour and hot red dust of the

weird town. There was a very fat man at the Club drinking a tepid John Collins, and he smiled to us and went on talking to someone else. There was a horrible flower called "poinsettia" and another plant called "bougainvillæa," and irises, very vivid and tired and wicked. The drinks in the Club were over eighty degrees Fahrenheit. We went back to the street and Club, looked at the goats and donkeys and the men and women, and the few drill-clad Europeans being carried about like corpses, and the sturdy Askaris at the Government offices; and tried to absorb the wild essential JAZZ of all Africa.

The people were every shade between bronze and plum colour, and walked like princes and princesses, but the wonder was in their clothes. I do not mean the clothes of those odd British subjects, the parsons and the clerks and the magistrates—all as black as their ill-fitting boots. I mean the clothes of the unaspiring proletariat.

This was a strange thing: that the work of the hands of the jaded operatives of the dismal city, Manchester, packed in bales like chrysalides, should enfold in a glory in the sunshine of the tropics? Who taught these savages the Renaissance trick of black and bright green with a flash of white linen on the chest? Or, how fierce and brilliant peacock blue looks against

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lemon yellow? Or, how to wear dull washed cobalt with a deep fresh carmine? They looked as Italian pictures must have looked before the years made them gentler to our weak modern eyes. Fair and beautiful ladies, who being yourselves without taste, go for guidance to the bourgeois French, I tell you that you must hire a Gold Coast nigger and set him up in a shop in London Town, for he will make you radiant in cheap Manchester cotton twill; and when you take your pleasure in the park, a roaring thunder-clap of colour, the trees, the rhododendrons and begonias and peonies, and your very rivals the peacocks, will wilt and bleach at your passing.

FIRST INTERLUDE

THE HARMLESS ALBATROSS

Hundreds of miles spread that great tent, the sky.
Hundreds of miles, the carpet of the sea
Spread, and the sun shone down upon our ship.
Her steady forefoot tossed the waves apart,
Her whiskered captain, orgulous on his bridge,
Frowned at his noisome freight of armèd men;
Scowled at their rustic, oafish, landward ways;
Scowled at their cries of "Come, my lucky lads,
And win a house and buy a motor-car!
Clicketty click," they cried, and "Legs eleven,

Top o' the 'ouse, Doc's cure, and Kelly's eye ! "
Until a red-faced corporal shouted, "'Ouse ! "
And scooped the pool ; and then " Heads down ;
 luck in ! "

The day-long rite was recommenced once more.
Then the dark captain took his arquebus
And with his black soul boiling in his breast,
Discharged his piece against an albatross.
Bleeding, the bird fell, and was lost astern.
" Deus ! " cried the barons, " Deus ! " the spearmen
 cried,
" For sure the bird had done the man no harm,
For sure the deed will bring the ship to harm,
Sancta Maria, save our souls from harm ! "
But, as it fell, we did not come to harm,
But sailed incontinent to Table Bay.

CHAPTER III

A KIND CITY

WE sailed on and on till we came to Natal. Before that we had sojourned in Table Bay.

I did not like Cape Town. We found a big place that looked as if it had been cut out of cardboard and painted by a scene-painter. We found that it was really a city with civilized people in it, all somewhat depressed and awe-struck by the fact that a galley full of strange, wild, and adventurous Australians was lying off their peaceful harbour. All the public-houses were shut, and the citizens walked "heeled" and in terror. I went to the Parliament House, and through a dismal debate on the question of Public Abattoir, seemed to hear the faint, shrill note of grinding axes. Not far away though there were roaring seas and silver woods on dark green hills.

On the way to Durban one night I leant over from my upper berth and found that Ambrose was reading Emerson. I asked him why he read Emerson, and he flew into a passion as if I had

called him a Jew. I explained to him that I had intended no opprobrium; that my only quarrel with Emerson was that he left me cold; and that in no sense had I asked the question, "Why have you such a funny soul that you lie there reading that detestable cheap Yankee vulgarian?"

He was so pleased that I did not regard Emerson as a Yankee vulgarian that his anger vanished. He was pathetically sensitive and protective in respect to that great man. He said he read Emerson because of the fiery words he wrote, and because he made people pause and think. He said: "I find it a stimulating exercise of the brain to read Emerson".

I said I thought Emerson was a peculiarly "flat" writer. Curiously enough, Ambrose agreed with me; but on reading his copy of Emerson, I found that Emerson was not a "flat" but a singularly varied and lively writer.

I told Ambrose of a man I admired very much who once came to me where I lay on a sick bed reading "The Life of Cobden". He said: "I can't stand John Morley; he writes in common time". Ambrose said: "That objection to a writer is a very foolish one. What does it matter what time an author writes in if his ideas are good?"

I said I thought it mattered a great deal, and

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this led to a terrible argument on the Degeneration of Life and Art in our Time. I said that the British people had the philosophy of life appropriate to monkeys, and that we were, as a whole, a slovenly, low, lecherous, gambling race.

Ambrose said that it was a noble thing in us to be a gambling race, and that horse-racing was his only recreation. At this point the cabin door flew open and a man named Marjoribanks, who looked like a noble lean greyhound, and held a commission in the Indian Army, burst in and launched at me an impassioned defence of immorality. Ambrose and he went at it, strophe and antistrophe, hammer and tongs for an hour, and I was never so bethumped with words.

Ambrose and Marjoribanks were both unmistakable gentlemen. My middle-class Scottish upbringing preserved for me a sense of novelty and delighted curiosity in dealing with such creatures. They were both public school and Regular Army, and had been kept unspotted from the world which revolves around and without the circles of the Samurai. Their manners were easy and distinguished and their mannerisms inoffensive. Ambrose was something of a fervent scholar of the type to which I imagine the Cecil brothers to belong. Marjoribanks was wild eyed and thin jawed, with a hard little moustache—the intelligent British

officer, sans peur et sans reproche. Each was entirely representative.

I sat embracing my pyjamaed knees and heard them defending, nay, raising to twin pedestals, as monuments of the nation's greatness, two practices I have been taught to regard as essentially evil. Their eyes shone and their jaws thrust forward, and they were as sincere as St. Paul in front of King Agrippa ; and almost they persuaded me that but for the Turf and the disorderly house our country would be in hell. Perhaps they were pulling my simple Caledonian leg. I do not know ; I do not think so, I thought it very wonderful.

The bulwark of morality on board the ship was a man named Thomas, and my thought turned to him as to an uncouth but powerful rock amid vicious seas of jade and emerald. He sprang from a stock of Nonconformist clergy. He was fat, rosy, and competent, and a doctor by profession—the same profession that owned the other fat men who played continuous poker in the smoke-room. Thomas never swore or played or drank, but he smoked prodigiously and was the moving spirit in all the less diabolic of the ship's enterprises. The subalterns respected him. In many ways he was an uncomfortable man. I thought about Thomas and felt happy, for I knew he would save the

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country from the wickedness of the great and the oafishness of the small. Not indeed a pukka sahib but a Force, was Thomas.

I pondered this, and the wild, strange views of Ambrose and Marjoribanks. What, I asked myself and paused for a reply, makes these middle classes so strong? They are feeble and individualistic in action. Their minds are nothing to brag of. They love money. They sit helplessly between the upper and the nether millstones and cry to their tiny gods in vain. They are perpetually crawling into the higher or sliding back to the lower classes. None is so poor as do them reverence. They have no religion and no ideas. They are apishly imitative of their betters. They are shackled by imbecile rituals. Their taste is appalling. Their moral and physical cowardice is beyond belief. And yet they are great.

Listen, I replied to myself, I shall give you the key to the situation. All our written and spoken speech is in middle-class diction, phraseology, language; our ideas are expressed in middle-class terms. Our newspapers are written by middle-class people with middle class-minds. Public speeches are made to middle-class audiences. The teachers of speech at the Universities are middle-class men. Books are published for sale to middle-class libraries. There

is a middle-class lingua franca used all through our public life, and no other language is understood or allowed. We have a monopoly of the Spoken Word.

It is for this reason that labourers and lords tolerate us and cannot do without us ; and it was for this reason that I felt the strangeness of the talk of Marjoribanks and Ambrose. Their language was the language of Jacob, but their talk was the talk of Esau.

So we came to the city of Durban. One of our crew of conscripts did not have to pay for a drink during his entire stay. He walked into the Club, and said in a loud voice, and from the bottom of his heart : " Durban is a city built by gentlemen for gentlemen ". The phrase pleased the inhabitants of Durban and towards this conscript they redoubled their already marvellous generosity.

Apart from its intrinsic magic, the phrase had the merit of being true. The Durbanians are a dear, delightful lot of people. The men who came on our ship were, take them for all in all, a very feebly representative collection of British soldiers. An English seaside town would have been sick to death of them in a couple of days. They were sheepish, dull, insufficiently smartened up, and would have been dissolute if they had been provided with money :

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but this did not matter to Durban; anything in khaki—provided it were not an Australian—it was their delight to honour. If an Atkins was seen looking in his dazed way into the window of a picture-postcard shop, a citizen would rush to him and ask if he was at a loose end. If Atkins said "Yes", he was hied away in a motor-car to the Berea, fed, entertained, picnicked, asked to bring his friends, taken to the bosom of the family. Durban did not 'old with herding mobs of bored Tommies to eat buns and hear fourth-rate concerts. For months they had been spending time and personal effort to give the soldiers a good time, and for months, I believe, they continued to do so.

But we had to go at last, and on the day we sailed, they came down to the quay and stayed there from seven in the morning till seven at night bombarding our ship with cigarettes, chocolates, oranges—and the most charming of farewell smiles.

SECOND INTERLUDE

HINDUSTAN

Over that port of Ind, where came our ship,
Like an umbrella hung a monstrous kite
Gnawing the knuckle-bones of dead Sassoons.
The rotting sea dissolved in poisoned steam.
A baron said, " McKillop with a host
Of Frankish warriors seeks the giant hills
Upon the confines of Afghanistan,
Whose tortured valleys never see the sun,
And myriad paynims lurk along the way.
Go, comrade, with them. See they fall not sick ".
When he had spake I swore an oath and went
Three thousand miles across the thirsty plains,
And twenty miles above the bitter clouds,
Where little rough-legged goats skip on the cliffs,
And hairy men with rifles scowl and shoot
And ring-tailed rats run up and down grey trees,
And purple cows are no phenomenon.
Eftsoons, when I had rested in Peshawar,
And then at Delhi by the palace-tombs,
I took a little ship for Bussorah,
And landed in the birthplace of the world.

II

MESOPOTAMIA

CHAPTER IV

TIGRIS RIVER

THE most remarkable story of hardship I heard during the late War was told to me on the Tigris as we meandered and bumped ourselves up river through a shade temperature of 122 degrees Fahrenheit. The teller was a huge, healthy youth of some twenty-seven summers. He had hair like newly painted cart wheels, a back like an ox, and a face like a ham; and he wore a quilted helmet and a patent spine pad. He had no collar, but he had two brass studs fore and aft, and shorts, socks, and large boots. He was not so helpless as the commonalty of reinforcing conscripts, for he had bought a case of Asahi beer. From this apparently insignificant cause, and from the fact that he never once told me that dry heat was more tolerable than moist, our brief friend-

ship sprang. He smoked John Dill in a large briar.

"It is absurd to imagine", he said, after I had joined issue with him on the subject of general medical practice, "that a man can make any headway as a consultant or in any specialty if he has wasted even one of the best years of his life in general practice. I do not know, of course, how it may be in the provinces. But you must admit that their contributions to modern medicine are so insignificant that it is scarcely worth while considering them. One must strike out at once on the line one intends to make one's own if one intends to cut ice at all in the profession".

"Not that one gets much encouragement", he went on sadly. "Take my case now. I am a psychoanalytic physician. I am on the junior staff at St. Caiaphas'. This year, after thinking things over, I decided to offer my services to the Government. I knew from what I had heard that psychoanalysis in the French base hospitals was in a very backward state, so I discussed the question with Sir Oscar Bulge, whom I know very well, and we dined with the D.G., who promised to see about it. Sir Oscar thought that Le Treport would be the place they could use me best. You can imagine my disgust when they sent me word that I was to go out

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East. Especially as I needn't have gone at all. However, Sir Oscar persuaded me not to make a row about it, and told me that psychoanalysis was practically unknown in Bombay, and the climate wasn't bad, and it might be quite possible to find some decent work there.

"Would you believe it, when I got to Bombay, I found that not only was the climate rotten, but that they wouldn't have me at any price—except as an ordinary M.O. They said they had plenty of mental specialists. I said, 'Look here, I'm a psychoanalysis, not an ordinary mental specialist!' They told me I'd get more psychoanalysis to do at Amarah or Busrah, because really very few wounded were getting back the length of Bombay. I might have known better by this time, but I took their word for it and went. When I got to Busrah there was only a young fool of a captain in charge who knew nothing about me, and wouldn't listen to me and pushed me up to Baghdad. I tried to see the A.D.M.S., but he was away shooting or something. I don't wonder there was a Mesopotamian scandal. Nothing but crass ignorance and officialdom at every turn.

"Well, here am I; pushed about from pillar to post, and on my way to Baghdad, which is practically in the firing line, man! How can I do practical psychology in the firing line? Eh?

Let alone the risk. I don't mind the risk to myself so much, but think of the waste, putting a psychoanalyst in the danger zone where he is liable to be killed or maimed for life. It's not as if there were an unlimited supply. . . ."

So he spoke, seriously puffing at his pipe and sweating great drops. I contemplated all these enormities for a while and wondered how far those great hairy arms could throw a 16-lb. ball—or a hand grenade. The Syrian look-out's cry of "Bot panee!" rang sleepily from forrard. The paddles chunked. The hot banks shimmered in the heat. I asked the man, in a devilish burst of suspicion, when he had qualified in medicine. I could not believe, somehow, that one who looked so young could have attained such indispensability in his profession, even if he had never done an hour's general practice.

He had qualified in 1914.

Though he had exaggerated the liability of the denizens of Baghdad to sudden death from Turkish shot and shell, there were other dangers lurking in the banks of that great, tawny old river, that perhaps he did not wot of. As we sat huddled in a lighter off Ashar Creek, a quartermaster-sergeant was struck by the sun, and developed, to my astonishment, a temperature of a hundred and ten; and then there was the case of Edgeworth and the card-sharks of Amara.

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Edgeworth was a mild, cultivated little fellow who had joined the army from a sense of duty, but who preferred growing roses and reading English verse to messing about among blood and rations and paysheets. On his way up river he stopped for a night at Amara, and, being at a loss for something to do, entered the Club and sat down. Amara was a place whose singular virtue was that you might meet anybody from anywhere—anyone you had known or dreamt of—in the space of a half-hour's stay. And Edgeworth met in the Club at Amara a mild, cultivated little fellow, who was fond of roses and of English verse, who lived, in happier times, with his aunts in Guildford, even as Edgeworth lived with his aunts in Richmond, and who disliked the War intensely. He was five years younger than Edgeworth and he was on his way to India, whither it had been decided to send him for his health. Their sweet, gentle talk was interrupted by the arrival of two lowbrows, who were obviously at home, noisy, and inclined to be friendly with Edgeworth and his companion.

“Just passing through?” said one lowbrow.
“Have something to drink, will yeh?”

“No, thank you. It's very kind of you, but no, thanks,” said Edgeworth. “Well, if I might have a very small whisky and soda.

Oh, thank you, thank you. It has been very warm to-day."

The lowbrows then suggested a quiet school of poker, but Edgeworth said he was not familiar with the game. As he was anxious not to appear churlish, however, he said that he had been accustomed to playing a little bridge with his aunts, and that he would be delighted to have a rubber.

"Fine", said the lowbrows. "We'll take the two of you on. Amara against the world."

They played. Edgeworth and his friend were two or three hundred down on the first game, and at that juncture the friend asked shyly what points they were playing for.

"Oh, we don't play old maids' bridge here, begod", said the second lowbrow. "The standard stakes is twenty dubs a hundred, but we can play higher if yeh like."

"Oh, I think that will be quite enough", said Edgeworth, feeling as if the bottom had dropped out of his stomach. When he dared to look at his affinity, he observed that he, too, was looking quite ill. They played and played.

Edgeworth told me about it afterwards.

"You know", he said, "I think when they talked in such a contemptuous fashion about old maids' bridge, they couldn't have played much with middle-aged maiden ladies. My

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aunts were really most frightfully keen, and apparently so were the other chap's. And I think too, when we realized what sharpers these fellows were, we pulled our socks up, rather. I can't imagine where they learned to play auction. In any event, we soon lost our respect for gambling-hell frequenters and card-sharks generally. I never saw such slovenly bridge. At last they got tired of it and we made up the scores. I found to my horror that I had won eighty pounds. I didn't want to take any money, but a colonel who had been looking on said I must, so they gave me twenty and an I O U for the balance. I think it was rather an extraordinary experience".

It was thus, whiling away the time in pleasant heat and unpleasant perspiration, that we slid, along the bottom most of the time, through the Garden of Eden, past Ezra's tomb, and up to Baghdad. We saw many arrangements in dust and muddy water, and one pretty sight. As we bumped into haven in the dark, two of our Arab boys dashed up the bank in the light of our searchlight to make us fast. They were dressed in blue jumpers and white drawers, and struck the quaintest and gracefulest poses against the dark purple sky. And we came to Baghdad.

Of this city I need say nothing to a generation

nurtured on " Chu-Chin-Chow ", " Hassan ", and the moving pictures. It is necessary, however, to mention that Khalil Pasha, for military purposes, drave a straight road through the city with dynamite. This was called the Rue de Khalil Bey. When the British Staff took over the town and labelled its little cut-throat alleys Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road, they elected to call this tragic and terrible Devil's Way—New Street. And that is still its name. We are a nation of poets.

THIRD INTERLUDE

THE SINDIYEH-WINDIYEH LINE

In a great plain lay Andrus and his Franks,
The paynim lay an hundred miles away ;
But lest he leap the leagues and take the town,
Andrus had twisted iron palisades
And dug long ditches and arrayed his host.
So dwelt we in pavilions for the nonce,
And chased the pig, and quaffed the burra peg,
And built our souls a lordly pleasure house :
While like two bulls in far Farangistan
Our comrades locked horns with the enemy,
And roared and gored, and turned and turned again.
And, where the elders of the nation sat,
Tossing his hyacinthine locks aback

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George spoke ! " Barons and peers and commoners,
Ye say to me : Lest we have bitter shame,
Wind now thine olifant and summon back
The Franks who, like the leaves for numbers,
Sweat on the soil between the two great rivers.
But let me tell you that this little band
Outnumbered and outfought hold on like hounds,
Their canine teeth deep in the tiger's flank.
I dare not summon back a single man."
Then sent he messengers against the sun,
Who said : " Fight, fight ! Advance against the foe ;
Deal to the King of Constantine a blow
Lest that I be debased and brought full low,
Lest the ill-minded spit upon me. No !
Push down the Jebel Hamrun, you must show
That all these things that I have said are so,
Boot, saddle, pack your haversacks and go."
The horsemen and the footmen fettled them
To fall upon the paynim, but, alas !
The paynim withered like the desert herb
Where drives the chariot of the noonday sun.
" Deus ! " we cried, " we fight with shadows here ! "
And marched till from the statesman's teeming mind
Other thoughts drave us forth. And then we rested.

CHAPTER V

AN ESSAY ON ANGOSTURA

TWO noble large green bottles, a small square clear glass bottle, a little black bottle with a hole through the cork ; a dozen or so assorted glasses—squat arrack glasses, taper port wine glasses, liqueur glasses, a job lot, various ; and some tall gentlemen in khaki drill and clean collars, who stand on dignified stiff legs, though the roof of the mess is an E.P. tent, and the floor old sacking ; a dinner has been arranged, and will shortly take place, when the corporal has put his tunic on and Hagan has dished the soup. The gentlemen meet each other every day, or at least write each other little notes praying for each other's kind attention and necessary action. They are almost friends. But so solemn are they to-night, so beclouded with gravity that the customary "Hello, old bean !" of conventional greeting sounds a thought bizarre, as if one had appeared at the gathering in his comic make-up.

The short dialogue :

"What will you have, sir ?"

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“ Oh, a very wee gin and angostura, thank you, Spencer ”, has the happy sound of opening flood-gates, loosening the first bubbling, vivifying streams on a parched and barren land ; whereat the broad terrain begins to smile, the little green shoots to thrust upward, and the multitude of birds of the air to chirrup and chatter.

It is not as if the colonel had asked for a vermouth *mélangé*, but strangely and subtly otherwise. And what if he had asked for a gin !

Who can trace the downfall of a good drink from high Olympus to a temperance platform ? The fact remains that the spirit of the juniper berry has sunk to be a sordid national joke. It is the sort of joke one grins at with a wry mouth, as at something both quaint and low ! The poet, in his lines :

*With my one little, two little, three little, four little
Drops of mother's ruin,*

has finely expressed the bitterness of that sardonic attitude of the public towards gin. Its very name has a mean and pitiful sound. No more annihilating combination of words has arisen in our language than the expression “ gin palace ”. All the pomp and all the baseness of mankind are in that phrase ; but “ gin and angostura ” —that is another thing !

What then is the virtue of this angostura,

without which gin is a lone Salmon without his Gluckstein, a Hodder without his Stoughton, a cold pea without its vinegar? By what virtue does it transform our sodden, leering pauper into a gentleman of circumstance by its mere association? It cannot be the fine filibustering name of it. Angostura by any other name would be a bitter. The pink gin of the Royal Navy stands to witness if I lie, and only to call gin by the name of a blush rose would not alter its intrinsic feeble blackguardism. But pink gins are drunk, so I am told, by solid, self-respecting men. And the glory of them is the glory of the angosturaness of the gin.

Is then angostura a drink of sufficient nobility to carry the ruffian dwarf, gin, on its shoulders with an air? Not so. For who drinks angostura as a drink? Only the sot on the day after, and for his stomach's sake. What then is the virtue of this angostura?

I think an analogy to the process may be found in the works of the ancient and, alas, forgotten novelists (those keen and just observers of human nature) whose rake-hell heroes were redeemed in the ultimate event, by the love of a pure woman—a character difficult to find in the length and breadth of our modern fiction. This lady is a docile creature. Her conversation is grammatical but uninspiring. Her beauty

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is not flaunting and voluptuous, like that of the worldly woman we dread and despise and do not wish our sisters to resemble, but hope in our heart of hearts to meet some day. It is calm and serene like a Sunday afternoon. There is a lurking devilment too, but it is never misdirected. Her tastes are inexpensive. I am sorry she is dead. Armed with her personality and the regard of her relatives and friends she fronts and overcomes a somewhat trying world. The rake-hell marries her ; and one by one, like the garments in the Dance of the Seven Veils, his horrible propensities flutter from him. The man who, in the prime of his wickedness, would walk boldly into drawing-rooms with the mud on his boots, now uses the doormat. The desperado who held up stage coaches a year ago, now holds up the parlour curtains—to see the effect. The smoker of five ounces of shag per week, the drinker of strong waters, the man of profane speech, the holder of intellectual debate with bargemen and cab-drivers, the stern villain who drove his unalterable course with never a lapse from his rigid cynicism—save, of course, at the touch of a little child,—this wild beast of the under-jungle is tamed and transformed. He feeds out of Edith's hand, and never collects his gravy with his knife as in the bad old days gone by. He wears slipp . . .

Just God, what an analogy ! Is there anything at all in the dual life of blood-boltered Harold and his lovely wife that bears any resemblance whatever to the delicate, devilish, harmonious, transcendental, joy-begetting union of Gin and Angostura ? None. Even such a marriage as that of Harold and Edith has all the dullness of a perpetual miracle, and nobody ever called Gin and Angostura dull. If his marriage had changed Harold into a Roland or a Paul Jones, or a Lancelot, then indeed he might have studied his history with profit to the matter in hand, but it did not change him so. I have always felt, and I am not alone in the feeling, that Lancelot in love was the less Lancelot. Nay, moreover, that the best knight in all the world believed as I believe, is proved out of his mouth.

Fair damsel, said Sir Lancelot, I may not warn the people to speak of me, they may speak whatsoever it please them. But to be a wedded man I think never to be, for if I were, then should I be bound to tarry with my wife, and leave arms and tournaments, battles and adventures. And as for to say that I take my pleasure with paramours, that will I refuse, and principally for dread of God. For knights that be lecherous shall not be happy nor fortunate in the wars, for either shall they be overcome with a simpler knight than they be themselves, or else they shall by misfortune and their cursedness slay better men than they be themselves. . . .

For him the wedded state was no dash of bitters to the soul, but, as it were, some tragacanthine mucilage to cloy and clog the swift mounting of his manhood's desire.

A dash of angostura ! It incites to pages on pages of rhapsody which, pardon me, I do not mean to furnish. But how could even a writer of fugitive reminiscences fall into the error of comparing the vividness and adventurousness that the rapid, skilful little process evokes to the attenuated and sugary bliss of the " wedding of two minds " ?

Let me rather compare this Transfiguration of Gin to what happened in my college days, when some dozen or so of us youths were accustomed to meet together for harmony, riot, or the indexing and righting of the universe by the medium of free and open discussion. A lot of Mouths we were ! I think of our pretensions and our talk with a blush. We talked theology in the language of the gutter, economics in the language of the kindergarten, art and literature in the language of the asylum. We esteemed ourselves great fellows. In imagination we saw a fantastic world spell-bound at our future pronouncements, nay, edicts. That we were idle fools did not occur to us, though you will remark well that we prided ourselves on the ruthless and unbiased clearness of our vision.

We had dissolved our sunny round table, and taken ourselves to our several booths when the great European War mercifully burst upon us before a crueller disillusion had time to engulf us. The War scattered us over the world all except Page, who became a conscientious objector and was cast into gaol ; which palling upon him, he became an Indispensable Labour Organizer, a calling he may still be following for aught I know or care.

Now, before all these things happened ; while we were still a noisome band of thinkers and blethers and noisy imbeciles, I have the vanity to perceive through my blushes that there was something heroic about us. There was some ring of the true metal among the counterfeit ; some golden aura effulgent through the dunghill sheen of our morbid imaginings ; a quality of nobility illuminating and glorifying the welter. What this quality was or whence came it, I could not for the life of me determine till I had already begun this essay on Angostura Bitters. I think I have come upon it now, to the joint profit of the reader and myself and a little to the credit of a friend of mine who is dead.

It is not known how little Simson came to be a member of our clique. He was a shy Arts man, with sandy hair and indeterminate features, which he hid modestly behind a gigantic pipe.

He was not clever. If we had realized his very presence (and we seldom did) we would have been conscious of the fact that he did not understand in the least what we were talking about. I think he admired us. Subconsciously we hoped and believed he did. He would sit there in his shabby clothes of dusty brown, curled up in the second best chair, and survey us with sardonic but kindly eyes. I remember there was something inscrutable in his quiet, timid face. Sometimes a member of the circle would address a remark to him out of the full tide of his eloquence, more in the spirit of a minor poet calling upon his gods, or a drunken man addressing a lamp-post, than in the desire for any sane interchange of ideas. Simson would reply, but in what terms I cannot remember, for neither I nor anyone else ever listened. His reply was short—that much I know—and he grinned nervously as he made it.

One day he disappeared—to take up an appointment abroad, I think, and all of a sudden we began to talk about him and to say what a good fellow he was and how much we missed him. And here is the peculiar thing: from that day in the picture gallery of my memory, the light that never was on land or sea has faded from my pictures of the clique. The loud talkers and the bold spirits have become little and mean, like a

page of *John Bull* or a middle-class rally. The fine great stream of words has become intolerably silly and empty. The elusive meaning has escaped through the meshes of youthful bombast. I could go on mixing metaphors all night and fail to express the desolation and sadness of the pictures in my mind of the post-Simson period.

I cannot tell what this magian gift may have been whereby Simson transfigured his surroundings and his company, but he shares it in essence with angostura. They tell me that angostura will shortly become unprocurable. Whether this is because hook-nosed financiers have bought it, or the Chancellor of the Exchequer has taxed it, or the Venezuelan Republic, in a strenuous leap towards the world movement against intemperance, has banned it, I cannot tell. Whether the lurid banks of the Orinoco have become suddenly barren of the wonderful bark, I do not know. This I can say, that if the rumour is true, it will be the death of gin. Gin may yet rear its tremulous head for a short century or so, like some ugly old ruin, with its naked hideousness swathed in the kindly ivy-bower of vermouth. It may wriggle insidiously in when the cocktail moveth aright in the cup. But with the vanishing of angostura its days will be numbered and gone its hope of immortality.

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All great drinks but gin have what perhaps you will allow me to call an emotional content. To each its own. Gin alone is dependent for its "content" on a few alien strange dark drops rinsed round a glass. Walking below the Lord's blue sky are mobs and movements and unhappy men in the same hard case. A solemn thought.

CHAPTER VI

THE BLOODY AFFAIR AT DELI ABBAS

UNDER the patient brown hands of certain members of the Jail Corps, our new mess had arisen like a fairy palace. A frieze representing the camel, or ship of the desert, progressing along the desert in convoy, entirely surrounded the mess-room. A cheerful fire of palm logs twinkled below the gun-rack. Portraits of the ancestors of members of the mess in real frames decorated the walls. Bottles of gin and vermouth and sherry and angostura caught the outermost beams of the fire. Outside, the cloudless sky stretched blue and far, and some of its blue, dancing on the turbid Tigris, made it seem, for the moment, a tolerable river. And still the barbed wire stood and the bulldog defence of the Sindiyeh-Windiyeh line went on.

By the fireside I found the Colonel and his new D.S.O. ribbon striking a warm and welcome note of colour in that already cheerful scene.

“ Good morning, sir ”, I said.

“ Good morning ”, said the Colonel. “ Look here ”, he said, “ I am fed up with this d——d

hole, and I hear there is a battle on this morning. It is a long time since I saw a battle. Let's turn out the Ford tourer and go and see this combat."

I pointed out that this battle was none of our affair. It had been my practice in the dear, dead days on the Western Front to avoid all battles to which I had not been specifically detailed. I then reflected that no more had it been my custom to drink sherry and bitters at 11 a.m., and that in any event we were east of Suez, and besides that it was a grand morning for an expedition of whatever character. I capitulated, and we set off for the battle-field.

The car contained a driver, the Colonel and myself wrapped in sheepskin, two guns, a luncheon basket with cold starling pie, beef sandwiches, and a quantity of Asahi beer. A lark was singing its "little guts out". Mesopotamia was all green and gold—more gold than green, but still the green was there. Blue jays and hoopoes, rabbits, partridges and pi-dogs shared the illimitable with us. The sun shone gaily. The Colonel and I sang "Drake is going West, lads", and the prologue to "Pagliacci", and felt very content as we bumped along for twenty or thirty miles.

"We should be near Divisional Headquarters by now", said the Colonel at length, and began to tell me what the General intended to do in

this battle, and what far-reaching effects would follow the defeat of the Turkish Army. While he was telling me this we sighted two officers of the Divisional Staff engaged in shooting sand-grouse, so we stopped the Ford and asked them for news of the battle. We also offered them beer, which they accepted at our hands. It appeared that the English had won a great victory, and that the Turks were in full flight before the pursuing cavalry of the Indians.

"You will have to hurry up if you are to see any of the battle at all", said one of the officers. So we pushed on. At Divisional Headquarters we were told that the General was following up the battle, which must now be upwards of twenty miles north of where it started. The Colonel made a rapid calculation and decided that following up the battle and being home in time for dinner were mutually exclusive. We adjourned to the Field Ambulance to hear the tales of the survivors.

Several rows of Turkish prisoners, under the benevolent eyes of a sentry and a serjeant of the R.A.M.C., were seated on the ground eating and eating and eating.

"They've been at it for the lawst two hours, sir", said the serjeant. "Gawd knows when the poor devils lawst looked a tin of bully in the fice. Makes your heart bleed, it does."

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We found the quartermaster in the mess tent, discussing a solitary whisky and soda. He told us that as there were no wounded the Medical Officers had gone pig-sticking.

“ The blutlust will out ”, said the Colonel, rather wittily, I thought, and we got into the car and drove home to dinner, which, I am happy to say, was well chosen, well cooked, well served, and, in quantity, ample.

And that, as I shall tell my grandchildren, was the only occasion on which I came near to seeing a shot fired in anger in Mesopotamia. . . . If you except the four rounds that two dear friends of mine, (the proprietors of a pet tortoise and a little mess threatened by crumbling banks,) squeezed out of their tiny pompom before it jammed and refused to fire again at that enterprising German aviator who tried to bomb our bridge head one sultry autumn day.

CHAPTER VII

FYVIE AND A TIGRIS NIGHT

PERSONALITY is an indefinable quality. It is rare among human beings but not, I gather, among actors. An actor would die of shame rather than confess to having none. But you and I are like the child whose bitter heart cry has not hitherto been recorded. "Here are my hands: there are my feet: here is my wee tummy: but where is my self"? If we have a personality, we are not conscious of its possession, and we meet few in our own walk of life of whom we can say, "He is a Personality (whatever his faults)!" For this reason and for many another I would like to draw Fyvie from my bag.

He was a lank Aberdonian, with a high forehead and a curling forelock, who wore parts of the uniform of a private in the Royal Army Medical Corps. In civil life he was a dispensing chemist. The curious environment that, from 1914 to 1919 or thereabout, moulded chemist, plumber, estate agent, miner, daidler, draper, and clerk

into a common uniform type, achieved no impression upon Fyvie. He invariably addressed officers as "hey, mister",—or "Captain", if he desired a favour. He wore a fatigue cap on the back of his head and a cigarette in his mouth or behind his ear. He was cleanly in his person, but only from lifelong habit. He told an artillery Colonel that the General was a nice chiel, real friendly and homely like. His serjeants treated him as one whom Allah had smitten—and indeed there was no other way to treat him. As a professional poisoner he had real merit. He was fond of work too, if he was given time and what he called a free hand.

He had not been long on the Sindiyeh-Windiyeh line before the Arabs, who know a good thing when they see it, discovered that Fyvie was a great Hakim. Little parties, quaintly reminiscent of Holman Hunt's "Flight into Egypt"—except that there were no visible cherubim in the air—used to come into the camp at all hours of the day and seek out Fyvie. From fifty, sixty, a hundred miles they came to him, from Euphrates itself.

"I give them a daud of quinine, mister", said Fyvie, "and a bit of laying on of hands. There's a great deal in Christian science after all. Ye see this auld body here, mister? She's a real decent widow woman, a Mrs. Hassan. She has

a wee housie over Baquba way. She consults me about some kind o' internal disorder, you'll understand better than me. She's a gey hard struggle, poor body, with six wee weans to bring up. The eldest, he's a weel-doing sort of lad. He's working the now—as a kind o' assistant gaffer on the new railway. But the second boy is a sore trial to her. He's got in tow wi' a girl down by Khan Nuri who they say's no better than she should be, and he's weel in wi' a bad lot o' young fellows. I gaed over and had a crack wi' the sheikh about her, he's a real nice gentleman, kens the family well, auld Hassan did one or two jobs about the hoose for him, a jiner he was to trade, and I persuaded the sheikh to gie her a bit grant out o' the Common Good. . . . But what I wantit to ask ye—What-do-ye-callum, the auld serjeant-major body was saying he thought the Colonel would be a wee vexed at me bringin' in yon gang of Arabs to build me my wee bit dispensary here. He's a decent chiel, the Colonel, and I wouldna like to hurt his feelings in any way; so you might mention it to him just when your sittin' kind of talking over old times that . . .”

One day as I had just saddled up to go jackal hunting with some gunners, Fyvie sent word that he wanted a consultation. I left the M.J.H., with his skinny Persian greyhounds—fierce,

hungry brutes all scarred with bites—and hurried to Fyvie's Pool of Bethesda.

His patient was an Arab boy of about nine years old who had been bitten by a jackal three weeks before. He was sitting on the ground with a semicircle of Arab women behind him, all keening sorrowfully. He held his arms bent and his hands flexed at the wrist somewhat in the position familiar in tetany; but he kept continually picking and tearing at his clothing. His head was held rigid, looking straight to the front, and he gave a low moaning cry at short intervals. Long ropes of mucus hung from his mouth and his tongue was partly protruded and swollen. He was stone blind. His pupils were widely dilated and did not re-act to light. His features were frozen into an expression of unutterable horror. I gave him morphia and atropin and tried to persuade his parents to leave him with us, but they took him away. I am told they put him into a dark, innermost room, bricked up the door, and left him to die, which he did two days later. I had not seen hydrophobia before and hope never to see it again. I did not hunt that day; and after two or three of our ponies had died from jackal bite the sport was put an end to.

Marbas and I drove over to see Asmodeus one night where he lived in a dug-out with an E.P.

tent over it. I think Bileth was there and a youth I had met in the low countries, where our armies swore so terribly. His name was Smith.

Marbas was a tall fair man with stooped heavy shoulders and thin legs, and a slight impediment in his pleasant Scotch talk that made him stop and close his eyes in the middle of some sentences. It was fatal to attempt to finish his sentence for him. One had simply to wait. At the back of his gentle manners and kind blue eyes Marbas hid the pride and obstinacy of Lucifer himself. He was a moralist and a lover of the poet Burns, and, among the old campaigners of the neighbourhood, had a reputation for bravery in the field that made them drop their voices when they talked of him.

Asmodeus was plump and jolly. He had been a crack three-quarter in his not far distant day. He was a theoretical amorist. Bileth came from the north of Ireland and looked like a young bull. Smith had long fair hair, a sallow complexion, and daft eyes. And we sat drinking punch and talking of this and that.

Marbas told us he had driven twenty miles that day to see a patient of Fyvie's, a member of the harem of a local head man. So we fell to discussing Fyvie and Billson, the orderly-room clerk, the British babu, a man as little touched by army discipline as Fyvie himself.

Asmodeus held that Fyvie and Billson would never have been tolerated on the Western Front, and this led to an argument ; for I had met on that front a person I took to be the own brother of Billson, and he had risen in the army far above all likelihood. As for Fyvie, I held that the Provost-Marshal himself would be hard put to it to put Fyvie in his place. Still, it had to be admitted that queerer flowers seemed to blossom on the hotter and more leisurely fronts than in the turmoil of the bang factory.

Marbas agreed with this admission. He had served in Gallipoli and in the early Mesopotamian days, but he treated people who had been in France and Flanders with the most charming deference.

" You fellows have been . . . through it ", he would say, tapping the ash off his cigarette to fill the hiatus.

He thought Fyvie would be kenspeckle anywhere. But of course he was Scotch.

" The Scotch have more individuality about them than the English ", said Marbas, " and more romance."

Smith said that he had lain a long day in a so-called rest camp ; and that next his tent had been a marquee containing twenty Cheshires and one Highland Light Infantryman ; and that through the sweltering day the voice of the Scot

was heard in the land shouting combatively :
 " Hey, youse perishers ! Have ye ivver hard
 the like of this :

*O gin my love were yon red rose,
 That grows upon the castle wa' ;
 And I mysel' a drap o' dew
 Into her bonnie breast to fa'. . . .*

Is that no' beautiful now, ye English scuts ?
 And nane o' ye ken who wrote it. It was
 Rabbie Burns that wrote it.

There was a lad was born in Kyle. . . ."

" Only a Scot would have talked like that
 on such a day and in such a place, and only
 Englishmen would have refrained from murdering
 him ", said Smith.

Marbas had been following a train of thought
 of his own, and although the story told by Smith
 had contained reference to Burns and an insult
 to his countrymen, Marbas let both pass.

" There's a certain amount of . . . a certain
 amount of romance about the Mesopot front too ",
 he said, and told a story.

There was an old abbess Marbas and the
 Colonel had afternoon tea with after the occupa-
 tion of Baghdad. She was in charge of a convent
 of missionary Sisters in the city. On the night
 of March 1917, the poor Sisters, hungry and

terrified, had gathered in their chapel. Khalil Pasha had left, but this they did not know. All they knew was that a massacre of Christians was bruited abroad. Shell-fire had been heard during the day, and scattered explosions and fires were reddening the sky that evening. Looting mobs with torches were about in the streets, and stories were brought to the convent, by frightened little converts, of blood running in the gutters. Shots and thin terrible cries could be heard in the dark, plain little chapel where the Sisters knelt praying. The abbess felt that death was very near. At last one old Sister, overwrought and shaking with ague, broke out in her high-pitched voice into a strange prayer. Over and over and over again she called on St. Michael, clothed in armour, to come down to Baghdad and rescue his poor hand-maidens. The abbess didn't rebuke her, and by and by the others chimed in with a sort of chorus to the supplication. The early daylight filtered through the windows. Heavy blows sounded on the door. The Sisters prayed with all their souls. The door burst open—and in the arched doorway, before a background of flame, stood St. Michael—a great steel helmet was on his head, great boots on his feet, khaki drill and webbing about his body, and the chevrons of a British serjeant of infantry on his arms.

"That is a good story", said Smith. "It should be possible to make a poem about that."

"It is a poem as Marbas told it", I said. "Why do you want to chop into lengths with a jingle at the end of each?"

"Because a poem is a little polished crystal comprising all the emotions and all the atmosphere of a very big solution of events", said Smith.

"Are you a poet, Smith?" said Bileth. There was a world of offence in his voice, so that his question, like a poem, was a crystallization of the contempt and furious raging of all the heathen.

"I think Smith should repeat us some poetry", said Asmodeus, who was a great reader of Aphra Behn, though he admired Surtees too.

We all asked Smith to repeat us some poetry, and this he did in a high, affected voice, having indicated that his verses were intended to crystallize life on the Western Front.

SMITH'S FIRST POEM

(WRITTEN BY HIM NEAR NEUVILLE ST. VAAST)

The bursting of a nine-inch shell
Is like a tree that grows in hell.

Across the grisly flats one sees
The budding of those sudden trees.

Along the acres of decay
They spring and grow and fade away.

52 SOME TALK OF ALEXANDER

For me, I like the trees that grow
As they were planted long ago

(Just past the cottage by the well),
Better than those that grow in hell.

Bileth encouraged him to proceed.

“ You must do better than that, Smith ”,
he said.

“ I shall recite to you ”, said Smith, “ a rather longer poem of a more imaginative character. The idea came to me one day as I stood in front of the notice board that gives the title to the poem. The scene of the poem is near Potije village, and the time is 1915.”

“ I remember ”, said Bileth to me, but Asmodeus stopped him with a wave of his hand.

“ My lords and gentlemen, pray silence ”, he said.

SMITH'S SECOND POEM

NO ROAD THIS WAY DURING DAYLIGHT

Farmer—lank and ghostly lies your last year's
corn,

A list is on your plum-tree and your cabbage beds
are torn,

Your hop-poles are down and a-rust is the pump,
The roof of your byre is lying on the sump,
And the farmyard is forlorn.

Twenty empty , id, before the company had tim
 A Johnny Walker on the
 floor
 Of the kitchen that you smoked in, and the bedroom
 that you slept in
 Has a chasm in the wall : and the shed your gig was
 kept in
 Has departed—is no more.

The tiles in the parlour are inches deep in clay,
 The stove is gone, a signaller has taken it away,
 And your lady's Sabbath gown is gay again with
 mildew,
 And a stain is on the lintel where the shrapnel
 bullet killed you,
 So you can't come back by day.

But at night when the mist is curtaining the flats,
 There is flurry in the nests of the interloping rats,
 And a rumble in the night very definite and slow,
 Makes the skinny backs to arch and the hot green
 eyes to glow
 Of the wild Wipers cats.

And you and Mrs. Hougbaert and Jeanne and
 Héloïse,
 Come trekking down the road where the great shells
 wheeze,
 And trundling comes the three-wheeled cart and
 long-tailed mare,
 And naked pigs and wolfish dogs and cows with gentle
 stare,
 And leaping little fleas. . . .

52 SOME TALK OF ALEXANDER

And I like the tear the yard and set
the place to rights again,
But you must let it tumble down before the dull
day lights again,
Or the Boche will shell it, please.¹

Smith was now flushed and excited. Before we could speak he broke out again.

"Half a minute, you chaps. For God's sake, let me give you a little thing I made up when I was out with a wiring party just by Railway Wood."

He would take no denial, and repeated to us in low, thrilling tones

HIS THIRD POEM

To-morrow's rain had kissed the moon at last,
And bound her sweetly with a golden fillet—
Close to my whisker there went chirping past
A lonely bullet looking for its billet.

When Pippa passed in Mr. Browning's play,
The villain paused to hear, and muttered "Blime!
And I was going to be bad to-day,
This singing flapper lays the blooming stimie."

And when the little copper plated stray
Whispered to me in passing towards its billet,
I thought, "This evening's promenade will—nay
Must make a better man of me"—but will it?

¹ "Please": A word used in the army to round off an otherwise bald and unconvincing chit. I take it to mean, "Hoping you are in the pink, as it leaves me at present".

" I think ", I said, before the company had time either to criticize or to change the subject, " that I have captured the atmosphere a little better in a thing I made up when I was working in a Divisional Rest Station behind the salient. It is called

THOUGHTS BEFORE LUNCH

How sweet, when I have put my gum boots on
And shaved, and so on—all the petty pinks
That make the red of war, when mankind sinks
Choking in mists of blood. . . . A morning gone
In simple labour : and the magic hour
Approaches, when the toil-worn soldier goes,
Alight with mild anticipatory throes,
Toward his hop-kiln Mess ; there to devour
Beef, stout, potatoes, carrots, cauliflower.

And sweet to think, when seven o'clock shall sound,
His weary soul will take a new relief,
From out the afternoon and evening round
With carrots, cauliflowers, potatoes, beef.

" You are an inefficient co-efficient ", said Marbas, and no pleading nor threats nor argument would tear from him a definition or a glimmering of an explanation of what he meant.

At this point, " Buck " Chaney, who had driven Drummy, our Transport Officer, and the Deacon across the desert in his mule tandem,

entered with his cheerful freight, and all was noise and conviviality. Buck had punched cows in his youth, and his voice was one accustomed to sound across the wide spaces where the alfalfa blows. He insisted on one and all joining in his great Revival hymn, "Hallelujah, you're a hobo", and, when it had been sung perhaps twenty times, and a fight between Buck and Bileth had been narrowly averted, and Drummy had tamed a furious tangerine with his whip-of-the-ten-foot-lash, and the Deacon had made a speech, we bade our host good night and took Ford for Sadiyeh, frightening the little jackals with our headlights, and singing our contentment to quadrillions of stars.

III

NORTH PERSIA

CHAPTER VIII

FINE WRITING

MY kit was packed and all was ready, when, two miles away along the rough road from Abu Saidah to Windiyeh, went two galloping mules and behind them a crashing, spluttering, star-flinging ammunition limber full of exploding bombs. Over against the low bund where the khan used to be the traces broke and the mules melted into the distant heat, leaving a great bush of white smoke which flung out noise and paraboloid lights at short intervals. When the quartermaster-serjeant and I passed on our car, there was left but one black smoking wheel regarded apathetically by English and Indian soldiers from whose eyes wonder had long since faded.

In the evening we crossed the dusty pudding-rocks of the Jebul Hamrin foothills and came to Ruz, where a great army had laid out one of its queer villages in orderly arid rows. Dumpguards clicked their locking rings, engines panted, ambulance cars rattled, pi-dogs howled, but everything looked very still. The sun went down and we found our siding in the dark.

Next morning we followed a trail of lorries over more hot foothills, and bit the dust by maunds, and so we came to Khaniquin. Khaniquin has suffered from three armies, and lies battle weary in the sunshine. It was hot and dusty and golden green, and a sluggish river full of mules and Arabs meandered through it. I lunched with the Indian Army in a room like an unfinished cathedral; and then we followed a trail of lorries over hot, dusty roads, and the great hills drew nearer. Towards evening, we passed a boundary tower on the brow of a hill and entered Persia. A number of pleasant dirty people in high felt brimless hats and coloured shirts and blue pyjama trousers were carrying stones to the middle of the road in sacks and dropping them there. They were watched by three cigarette smokers in shirts a degree cleaner and three-tailed whips in their hands. A stiff-jointed Atkins moved slowly along the roadside swinging a big stick, and work speeded up as

he approached. The toilers had many a joke among themselves, and fought and sang at their work like happy men. This is the song they sang :

*Allah-ilah ! Come on, come on !
Jaldijaldijaldijaldijaldi !*

“ Jaldi ” is Urdu for “ quickly ”, and “ Come on ” is the phrase unconsciously used most often by the Englishman abroad. At least I suppose so. In my travels I met many a man who had it as his whole English stock in trade.

At last we saw the true wall of Persia and saw it by the falling sun. Never the maddest vorticist dreams a thing so ugly and bizarre as that wild range of mountains, with their brutal truncated bluffs, squat tumuli, long searing sandstone and basalt gashes, their pinks and slates and greys all washed with the bloody sunset. Here and there a curve of mountain ridge would begin to sweep with some nobility, only to be brought up short by a sordid geometrical joke. Qasri-shirind sat, a solemn bundle of flat cubes done in glaring mud-yellow, patterned all wrong and shrieking to a green bice sky. For such a landscape, you must know, the appropriate drink is whisky (Irish) and chlorinated water, and this I had, and crossed a hill into the

darkness. The darkness was lit by line upon line of burning scrub, deep in sheer valleys and hung over with a canopy of crawling smoke. Through hell's entrance hall we came at last to a dark river twinkling with storm-lamps and the silence and peace of hell's back parlour. Seripul was its sinister name.

We awoke at the foot of the Paitak Pass and a huge and lusty wind blew through a plain between immense and righteous mountains. The dry leagues of Nothing, dotted with frowsy palms and beaten on by the fierce violet sun, became a dull memory.

At the summit of the Pass the wind blew clear like crystal and gentle as the hand of a maiden, and the sky was very blue. Down we went again through a gorge to a tableland where the fields were green and the great pink mountains shielded and did not menace. There was one village of gardens and many waters and a night's rest. There were strange bridges and torn hamlets where the Brotherhood of Man had left its hoofprints as it fled from the Turk—hunger, rape, murder, destruction, disease, and dirt, and then, because we had been good, God showed us Kermanshah in the evening.

O jewelled Persia, dreams of shimmering silks and dropping waters and musk and topazes and zephyrs and honey and myrrh are netted

in the soft sound of your name ! For one evening those dreams came true.

Behind the little coral town sat a nobly perfect mountain like an Emperor, all mauve and old rose and deep purple shadows draped over beaten gold. Round its noble broad base the gossamer mirage floated, indeed that mysterious river that flows round fair Elfland, seen by John Keats and forded by Thomas of Ercildoune in the twilight. Away to the south—but if I have been fool enough to describe the magic mountain, believe me there are degrees in folly, and no fine writing here will slander these infinite leagues of wonder.

Kermanshah is situated on a mound and surrounded by little towers, in each of which brass-mounted hoboos smoking long wooden pipes pretend to keep the peace. There are groves of poplars before which pose and gesture the inhabitants in perfect harmony with the laws of colour and form. The rich and the bucks and wits promenade in the evening in very small round hats and frock-coats with Presbyterian skirts, and turn grave, innocent, olive countenance to the setting sun. Some wealthy Arabs walk among them in black and green and exquisitely laundered linen, wagging their scarlet beards ; and little boys in pyjamas and the tremendous Persian hat, looking like little kings on a chess-

board ; and sturdy ruffians in faded blue and yellow ; and little girls in pink bridal dresses and pearls ; and veiled ladies in black and flowered silk ; and very poor and starving persons.

We skirted the city's suburbs and avoided its characteristic stinks. Then we came to a gentlemanly broad road and a bridge with pointed arches, below which ran a rushy peacock-blue river. And such was the glamour of that place that the soldiers, as they lit their bivouac fires on the dim and dusty banks, looked not only grand but beautiful.

Next day and the next again we journeyed, and at a place called Khangavar, I met an old Arab in a telegraph office.

An Arab could enter the innermost gorges of Thibet or the Bowery of New York and definitely and unmistakably give all his ideas to his interlocutors without the knowledge of a single word of Thibetan or of American. And not as regards food and drink only or in the common things of life. He can express things holy, things political, things metaphysical, things economic, things comic with his light, fluent, and genteel gestures.

My first encounter with this strange gift had been in Mesopotamia, where I had a delightful colloquy with an Arab on the slender capital of the words which follow :

<i>Arabic</i>	<i>Hindustani</i>	<i>English</i>
Makoub	Bas	Offsar
mafish	tikh	feenish
baksheesh	malum	
	jao	
	"subcheese"	
	atcha	

Part of the dialogue ran as follows : ¹

ARAB.—"I wonder if you'd oblige me with a temporary loan? I have always found British officers most excellent fellows. After all, the country belongs to the Arabs, and you're under no compulsion to stay here, but if you do, for the Lord's sake, why not make yourselves pleasant?"

I.—"Alas! I cannot oblige you. I have no money. Besides, the Arabs are a lot of scoundrels, and will not go to heaven when they die. You are one of the worst of them."

ARAB.—"Oh, if you are so hard up as all that, allow me. Take my basket, take everything.

¹ In Mesopotamianese this dialogue should read :

ARAB.—"Offsar sahib, baksheesh. Subcheese Arab. Offsar sahib. Soldyar sahib; la, la, la. Subcheese Offsar, saldyar sahib, Arab jao! Offsar sahib. Nay, nay! Offsar sahib tikh. Baksheesh, sahib."

I.—"Nay rupee. Bus, feenish. Kharab. Arab feenish."

ARAB.—"O, O, Offsar sahib, Arab baksheesh Offsar sahib. Subcheese. Tikh. Atcha sahib!"

I.—"JAO!"

The Arab's nobility of character will not permit him to stand by and see a British officer in want ! ”

I.—“ You weary me. I would be alone.”

The G.P.O. Khangavar was entered by a low lintel, through a shady courtyard with a tank and a fountain in the middle, and up a flight of two-foot steps. A crowd of children followed the Staff Captain and me to the foot of the steps, all shouting together excitedly, “ Russky, Russky ”. Russians were the only kind of European they had seen before. The telegraph office was painted white, and had shelves and divans and rich carpets. A samovar was bubbling on the floor. At a table in the window a bearded operator knelt, and wrote curly characters in a faded yellow book. At intervals he clicked and buzzed on a little old make-and-break key. An old Arab sat on the floor watching him.

Our conversation with the operator was as tedious as a business conversation is apt to be when neither of the parties know anything of the other's language, native or acquired. The Staff Captain solved the problem brilliantly by writing out his message in morse.

While this was going on, the old Arab, whose interests were wider than mere armies or dot-dash gadgets, told me of the marvels of his journeys from Basrah to Baghdad, from Baghdad to Teheran, from Teheran to Samarcand. He

called on me to admire the splendour of the apartment, and thought that it must be like these in London, a city he had never seen, and never would, being an old man. He commented bitterly on the civic government of Baghdad; and reflected sagely on the Souls of Great Ships, the Spirit of Travel, and the Changes of the Times; and the only words he used were the names of towns.

We slept that night nine thousand feet above the seas of the world, and by and by came to smelly Hamadan, which was being administered by the Hush-Hush Brigade—perhaps the bravest body of men and the feeblest collection of administrators that has ever grouped itself together on a “dark and dangerous enterprise!”¹

¹ The Earl of Oxford and Asquith in a speech at Paisley.

CHAPTER IX

THE SITUATION

IF anybody who has read thus far imagines that I am writing a history of the War in Asia, or rather the more recent doings in the cockpit where Alexander and Cyrus ruffled their plumes, I shall reward her by devoting two or three pages to an account of what all this marching and perspiring and chit-chat was about.

Up to the taking of Baghdad in March 1917, the main line of penetration in the gigantic German scheme for the absorption of the East was the Berlin-Baghdad Railway. When Sir Stanley Maude took Baghdad and the Turks began to run, the German vision took on actually further north, and the Berlin-Baku-Bokhara line began to take shape in their scheme. By the autumn of 1917 the Russian Army of the Caucasus had melted like snow off a dyke, and the line lay almost clear. The Turkish chestnut-cat marched to Tiflis, pushing aside the inconsiderable opposition of the disorganized Armenian troops and such of the other Caucasian elements as had any fight left in them.

With the object of upsetting these arrangements, General Dunsterville, the Stalky of Mr. Kipling, took his way to Baghdad with the once celebrated Hush-Hush Brigade. This was a collection of adaptable young men drawn from the Western front by a circular asking for volunteers for a difficult and hazardous enterprise. Their idea was to get through to Tiflis by hook or by crook, and, once there, to organize any loyal Caucasian elements against the Turkish invader. Several books have been written about their adventures, for they rapidly made a point of ceasing to deserve their silent soubriquet. Dunsterville's own book is much the best, but Donohoe and French are well worth reading ; and the expedition has the signal honour of being referred to in a glorious book by Rawlinson—a book you may read with a thrill of pride in the human race, even if you don't happen to be an Englishman. Suffice it to say that they never got to Tiflis, and were indeed hung up in Persia till the brigade to which I was attached came up and carried them along to Baku. The Persians, under Russian inspiration, had begun to work out their own salvation along Bolshevistic lines, and rather considered that the Hush-Hush Brigade were making free with a neutral country—as no doubt they were.

Dunsterville himself motored unconcernedly

about through very unfriendly country, into terribly warm places, and bluffed and blarneyed himself out again. At Enzeli he had trouble with the local soviet, and while they were debating whether to boil him in oil or to throw him to the sturgeon, he just went away. But he was not thin-skinned where the welfare of his country was concerned, and returned later without the smallest encouragement from his hosts. At one period he found himself in Hamadan, the Ecbatana of older days, with twelve officers, two clerks, and forty-one motor drivers, surrounded by some three thousand armed men who had decided definitely to cut his throat. He won through by taking absolutely no notice, and by pushing his intrigue and relief work as if he were an Army Corps; and when he was ultimately rescued by some hussars, he looked quite happy and comfortable.

When reinforcements arrived, some of them were scattered along an enormous front to guard against any threat by the Turks at the great Russian military road, and the rest were pushed on to assist in the defence of Baku. That part of the road which ran from Menjil to Resht was rendered unchancy by the presence of one Kuchik Khan, the Sir William Wallace of Persia. He had been beaten at the battle of Menjil by a force of Cossacks under Colonel Bicherakoff.

This force represented the remnant of the loyal Russian Army, some of whom, you may remember, did a famous ride into Amara soon after its capture by the British forces. Bicherakoff had withdrawn into the Caucasus, and Kuchik Khan, at the head of a force of jangalis, or jungle people, had emerged from his forest fastness and was harassing traffic on the road to the Caspian.

In South Russia, Bicherakoff was at Petrovsk. The Turks had passed Elizavetpol, and the Christians of Baku, with a lively sense of trouble to come, were arming and shouting, "Help, help!" to Dunsterville and Bicherakoff alternately. Their apprehension was increased by the fact that in the short happy days of the Revolution, and under the countenance of Russian soldiers, they had sent some 9,000 Tartar Muslims to Paradise in the streets of the city. The Turks were also at Tabriz and Urumiyah, and Syrian and Armenian refugees were pouring into the British lines. The British troops in North Persia, who could not have been more than some 4,000 in number, were assisted by Persian levies raised and trained by the Hush-Hushites. A friend of mine once took 100 of them on a reconnaissance. They saw one Turk and ran twenty miles. This is a fact.

The 39th Brigade defended Baku, while the Russians assisted, when in the vein, and the

Armenians . . . were a disappointment. Even the thought that a sticky death awaited them on the fall of the town did not improve their fighting qualities. They were in the habit of removing their (privately owned) machine guns from the line, and spending week-ends in the town whenever there was a social function that demanded their attention, and, on the appearance of the enemy, invariably retired in disorder. Their army was organized, and generally staffed on the most approved communistic principles, and in a little General Dunsterville had enough of it. He withdrew his troops in good order, sailed past the Russian gunboats while they were debating whether to fire, and left the citizens of Baku to their well-deserved fate. It was during this evacuation that Rawlinson performed the incredible feat spoken of in his book. He took a little steamer full of explosives, loaded with armed Bolsheviks whom he had driven on board because of the congestion at the quay, and manned by terrified sailors who had no intention of making such a perilous voyage—he took this ship out between the two guardships, who fired on him heartily and hit him six times with shells. His army consisted of nine true men against a hundred terrified mobsmen thirsting for blood, and his main defence was a breastwork of dynamite cartridges built up on the bridge.

All this, as a witness at a court martial once said in my hearing, is "the whole truth and nothing but the truth—I hope to God!"

FOURTH INTERLUDE

THE MARCH TO KASVIN

Dunsterville rose and called on Ganelon
Who came from Canada beyond the seas,
And said: "Companion, when the spearmen come
I will that you so move them to and fro
And tell them whither they must come and go;
Where lie the flocks and springs and where the foe".
Said Ganelon: "The surest thing you know".
So when our host had come to Hamadan,
Said Ganelon: "I am some tickled kid.
Behold in me a peaceful penetreer;
'Tis you must blast for us a way athwart
The paynim to the snowy Caucasus.
To-morrow will come camelopards which
Will bear your fardels to the stormy north".
Then came the camels and their camel men,
Whom we did beat about the head with sticks,
And so we journeyed northward by the road
The tall Slavonians made in days gone by.
Now tells the tale of how the footmen fell
Parched, sore, and panting by the stony road;
And how the camels bubbled and were lost
And found again, and how the road stretched on
Interminable like a jongleur's chaunt;

72 SOME TALK OF ALEXANDER

Of how Archbishop Turpin skinned his knees
With marching in the sunshine, till his talk
Was all of depilation. But the peers
Kept ever speaking of some vision feast
When next they ordered dinner at th' Savoy.
So ten long days they marched, and came at last
To where the wind blew wild across a plain
Or what the Caledonian calls a "coup";
And there we ate the flesh of cows preserved
In iron, and a quantity of dust;
But were content to have arrived at last
Footsore and weary at our journey's end.

CHAPTER X

THE STRONGHOLD OF THE ASSASSINS

KASVIN, the last stronghold of the assassins, was like the rest of North Persia. That is, its streams flowed uphill, and its citizens were exactly like Charles Chaplin. It was surrounded by a large ditch full of decaying animal matter from which a stench rose continually to heaven. It was irrigated by a hundred little street-side streams which were used for drinking and ablution, and in which it was no uncommon sight to see a citizen who had dragged himself thither for a drink, dying of cholera. There was a Boulevard, a little tumultuous on the surface, but as pretty as a photograph, with its rich trees and mosaicked gateways. The East crawled and trotted along it, and here and there a Cossack swaggered, polished and silver mounted, and armed to the teeth, with no marks of modern civilization of his fresh young arrogant face. I saw a Punch and Judy Show one day in the Boulevard. It was a little low affair with no proscenium, but the puppets hit one another and squeaked in a way to make a lad sick for home.

My first act on arriving in Kasvin was to report to the Big Chief Medicine Man and ask him what to do. He was a lean, brown man of Ireland, and I found him in a large house in a Persian Garden. The plaster walls were covered with cuttings from *La Vie Parisienne*, and the B.C.M.M., in his shirtsleeves, was killing flies with a swatter. As I entered he said :

“ And four more corpses makes two hundred and thirty-one. Thank God you’ve come at last ! And before I tell ye what you’ve got to do in this jerry-built hell, I will give ye the three commandments for a medical officer on a difficult and dangerous enterprise. They are these : Cultivate the spirit of adventure ; never cry, ‘ Help, help ’ ; and draw your pay. And the greatest of these is, draw your pay.”

“ Sir ”, I said, “ all these have I kept from my youth up.” What we had to do in addition was to get a hospital going, and this we did with the assistance of unlimited funds and the advice of a glorious old lady called Miss Holliday. How glorious she was I cannot, and how old she was I dare not tell ; but she was an old lady when she rode across the snowbound passes thirty-five years before to serve her God and the American Mission. She told me a story once as I took a dish of tea with her in her scented garden off a high-walled back street.

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It was about a bandit called Mirza Khan. Miss Holliday let me see his photograph, and he was a big fellow with a huge moustache, swathed in bandoliers and hen toed because he was seldom out of the saddle. Miss Holliday heard that there was a Christian Syrian in his harem, and rode fifty miles to Mirza's mountain fastness to see her. Mirza resented this, and told Miss Holliday that he had a good mind to put her to death. He had, however, the incurable Kurdish admiration for pluck, and told Miss Holliday that he would be loth to send such a courageous old woman to Gehannum. Miss Holliday told him he needn't let the Hell consideration weigh with him, as, with all humility, she was more concerned about his chances in the next world than about her own. Mirza said, "Don't talk foolishness. I am a Believer". Miss Holliday said, "Yes, but you are a very bad man. If all accounts are true you are a drunkard, a loose liver, a thief, and a murderer, and your own religion has strong objections to all these activities". Mirza said, "You let my religion alone. God put a mark on my forehead at my birth, and made me equally a murderer and a true believer. Therefore I shall go to paradise, and you shall be damned in Hell".

It was no use arguing with him ; but that did not deter Miss Holliday from arguing with him

well into the evening, so that Mirza said, "I have never had such an interesting talk in my life. I enjoy a good talk even if it is all nonsense. I shall keep you prisoner, and we shall have a long cosy chat every evening when I have finished robbing my cowardly dogs of neighbours". And so they did.

In about six weeks a Turkish commisar arrived for his quarterly baksheesh, and pointed out to Mirza that Miss Holliday was an international complication and must come back with him to Tabriz. Mirza was very affected, and wept at the parting, begging Miss Holliday to come back and visit him every now and again. This she did.

The next photograph Miss Holliday showed me was of Mirza, his vizier, and his son, taken in a group before a background representing the Capitol at Rome, and surrounded by tiny Armenian citizens of Tabriz in cheap European clothes. They looked like three lions at a fox's tea party. The Armenians had enticed Mirza into Tabriz on the pretext of some commercial venture—Brigands Limited, or something Miss Holliday was not quite clear about. Whatever it was, it was only a camouflage for treachery, and when the photograph was taken the lions, although they did not know it, were in the trap. Miss Holliday showed me her third photograph.

In it Mirza Khan, his vizier, and his son were

hanging from a Tabriz balcony by their feet naked, and riddled with bullet-holes. Their arms hung stiffly at right angles to their shoulders—"Just like the Crucifixion", Miss Holliday said.

We heard many brigand stories in Kasvin. One Eastern telegraph man had quite recently escaped from a situation reminiscent of the close of an instalment of a cinema serial; he was stripped, trussed like a fowl, and the executioner bandit had lifted his knife, when the captive suddenly thought of a slightly indecent Persian joke, and let them have it through his chattering teeth. They unbound him, when they had grown tired of laughing, presented him with a perfectly good camel, and sent him home.

The brigands of the bazaar also liked their little joke. Padre Bolitho, who had lived for many years in Ispahan, went with some of us to the bazaar to buy carpets. After half an hour's bargaining with a disgusting old robber, the padre said :

"Why do you tie a big stone to the tail of a mouse when it is trying to escape through a little hole?"

The merchant immediately threw himself back on his carpeted bench with his heels in the air, so that we thought he had had a fit. Then he roared and chuckled and crowed with laughter, now clapping his hands, now holding his sides,

the tears streaming from his rheumy eyes and down his ragged beard. Then, as we thought he must surely die, he suddenly regained his immobility and threw the carpet at the padre. "Keep it", he said.

Kasvin is probably an amusing place. We were not students of Persian, their jokes were lost on us, and for a time we found time heavy on our hands. Wounded came down from Baku, whither the brigade had gone to put up a brilliant defence in very discouraging circumstances. And our working hours were well occupied.

Later there came some diversions; one we found for ourselves, and another was provided by our temporary fellow-citizens. The time of the Muhurru came round, and we discovered the Dunster Café.

They tell me that the Muhurru in India is a dull affair. It is far otherwise in Kasvin. For a fortnight before the day little tin and bagpipe bands promenaded the town carrying tinselled Christmas trees and torches and making a row. On the Big Day, the anniversary of the battle of Kerbela and the slaying of Hussein and Hassan, we stood on the steps of the Hospital, and watched the procession pass between the rows of poplars. It began with a few horsemen and a band on mules and camels, playing drums and bagpipes

and cornets. They played three or four minor bars, most sweet, most melancholy, over and over again. Then there were strings of camels muffled up to the eyes in particoloured tassels and all sorts of seedy pageanteers in dingy fancy dress, torch bearers, banner bearers, and canopy bearers; and then a gentleman on a litter with a spear sticking out of his stomach. Hussein, I think. He was followed by another band of minstrels and a crowd of youths in black, lamenting and whacking themselves with bunches of chain. Then came, on either side of the street, a row of men in white shirts, shoulder to shoulder and chasséing sideways, waving great swords and shouting hoarsely, "Hussein, Hassan!" and "Ali, Ali, Ali!" Every now and again one of them would take his sword in both hands and hit himself on the bald forehead with it, making a noise like a butcher chopping beef. Their shirts were boltered with sticky blood. Most of them looked ill. Five of them died, I believe. The dust and the noise and the blood and the excitement made me physically sick after four years of war and a medical training. In the tail of the procession came some wee children, hitting themselves hefty wipes with formidable knives and bleeding with the best of their elders.

It was pleasant to turn to a Christian house of entertainment and recreation, and such was

the Dunster Café. Ayporos found it. In the lapis-lazuli, honey-dropping lane of Persia, where we lived on apples, and melons, and peaches, and nectarines, and grapes, and pears, and pomegranates, there was yet a want. There was nothing to drink but arrack and mastik, dreadful, devilish, drinks fit only to prime Shiahs for a Muhurum. It was possible, indeed, to get good whisky even in that far-off spot. But whisky and Aberdonians are everywhere. Ayporos had got some by the simple expedient of sending his batman to the bazaar with a great deal of money ; but because he considered five pounds ten too much to pay even for a bottle of J*** D****'s White Label, he did not repeat the experiment. It happened once as he was a-walking, that from the multitudinous aromas of the East there singled itself a dear and long-lost odour. Ayporos looked up, saw a little signboard that said, "Dunster Café", entered, and regaled himself on authentic beer, from Russia.

The Dunster Café was kept by an Armenian named Henry, a ci-devant tenor from the Tiflis Opera and, though he knew no English, and but ten words of French, he was soon our friend. In his little back room, with stacks of beer on the white-painted sideboard and a merry, palm-log fire roaring up the chimney, we would feast on reason and allow our souls to flow, while Henry

sang us little Cossack songs, and bits from "Rigoletto" and "La Traviata". I remember he had also a striking impersonation of a drunken man being thrown out of the Imperial Opera House at Petrograd, and a fragment telling how the big bells of Moscow sang, "Vodka-Vodka, Vodka-Vodka", and the little ones, "Vino-vino-vino-vino!"

One night a great gale blew from headquarters. The Big Chief Medicine Man arrived when we were in our evening baths with the news that the Hants and Ghurkas had retired on Zinjan in face of overwhelming odds; that several officers and others had been killed, including Drs. Theodorus and Legend of the original Hush-Hushites; and all wounded and sick were to be out of the hospital by nine o'clock next morning, and that a dressing station with the object of picking up wounded from under the hooves of the Turkish cavalry was to be made.

We accordingly loaded up a large number of unfortunate devils on lorries, and the remainder we placed on native fourgans, enormous four-wheeled wooden carts, drawn by four horses abreast. The lorries took two days to make Hamadan and the fourgans twelve, but the four-gan passengers were the lucky ones.

I took the convalescent camp down to Sultana-bad, where we lived in dusty tents, and drank

water which was a saturated solution of magnesium sulphate. And nothing happened.

Stay. One day two horses passed at a gallop, dragging behind them the remains of a phaeton. Later a large and ugly man in a frock-coat was borne into our camp. He had been thrown out of the vehicle we had just seen, and had sustained a broken shin bone. In attendance was a mild little gentleman in a beard who appeared more concerned than if his own shin bone had been broken in pieces.

When I had made his leg comfortable, the ugly man let me know through his secretary or factotum that he was an uncle of the Shah. I did not see why I should believe him, but I listened to hear what he had to say next. He told me that he must get to Teheran that night, and demanded the use of a motor ambulance. I said that this was out of the question, as we had too few ambulances for the necessary transport of really important sick British soldiers, and as for the Shah, who was he, and who his uncles? On this he passed from demands to honey-sweet pleadings. He began by offering me a pearl necklace which the secretary was carrying in the tail of his frock-coat; and went on in an ascending scale till he came to the quite magnificent offer of five thousand riflemen with rifles in their hands. If I had believed him, I

should have closed with this offer. There was much one could have done at that time in the way of travel, sport, and adventure with five thousand riflemen—even Persians. But I thought him an old liar, told him so, and that I held His Majesty's commission and was not to be bribed, and left him. In a little he was moved by horsed ambulance to Kasvin, where they believed him even less, and put him in a little closed shed in the courtyard, because the hospital was full. In half an hour the Persian Governor of Kasvin arrived with an enormous suite, a cold collation, and several bottles of brandy, to pay a state visit to my patient. They made a night of it with song and sentiment, and the next morning the Colonel considered it his duty to his other patients to forward the uncle to Teheran. As it turned out, to perform his promises to me was well within his capacity, but the only man who made anything out of it was the driver of the Ford. He was presented with the pearl necklace, and was robbed of it on his way back to Kasvin. So the pomp of the world goes by.

While I was at this place of the Wersh Wells, the influenza pandemic assaulted us. It struck us simultaneously from Transcaspia, from Transcaucasia, and from Bombay, speeding as fast as a man could travel, and at the same time took the Turkish Army by the throat. But all that is another story.

FIFTH INTERLUDE

THE JOURNEY TO BAKU

The gonfalons of our host shimmered away
In rocky distance through the Kuflan Ku,
And I was left alone in sad Kasvin
With strangers and the winter all about me ;
For, sans his sword and pent in durance vile,
A baron waited trial by his peers,
And I was of the number sworn to judge.
But on a day bediamonded with frost,
I mounted on my litter and was borne
Through vermeil crags and darkling forests green,
Through weary swamps where cut-throat Jangalis
 prowled,
Through to the borders of the Caspian Sea,
And there I dwelt awhile, for no man knew
When that the mariners would unfurl their sails
And breast the shallows and seek far Baku.
Like Charlemagne, I slept as one who toils,
Until with jennets and with ordnance proud
A ship was loaded, and I went aboard.

I travailed sore, and O ; my dark-skinned slave
Was sick to death, and so were all the crew,
Then thought I what a joy it were to drown . . .
But, on a miry morn, we sighted land.

IV

BAKU

CHAPTER XI

THEODORUS AND ISABELLA

I

"THIS is a town", I thought, "and these, that have even now done their best to pitch me out of this little Ford, are streets. O sluttish streets, brave little half-empty shops, decayed blocks of offices, stone-fronted jerry-built flats, you are the outworks of my home! See, there is a brass plate!"

The Ford took me to a flat, and a nice soldier with a charming grin told me that this was where I was to live. So I mounted the staircase, running my finger lovingly along the imitation marble on the walls, and found myself at length in luxury. It was a big L-shaped room. A gigantic Teuto-Persian rug lay on the floor. There was a great tiled stove. By the windows

there stood (I swear it) a grand piano and a cheval glass. There were palms in little tubs, and a leather settee and chairs. In the short limb of the L there was an oaken table and a sideboard with decanters on it. The walls were papered with gold brocade, and the wood-work was clean and painted white. I sat down on the settee and tried to realize all this.

Suddenly an outcry rose from the back premises. The voice was high-pitched and unfamiliar. It was answered by the mumbling childish tones of some outlandish imp.

“Where are my trousers, you young devil?”

“Gospodin, Capitan. . . .”

“Go and get them. Where are they, eh? Where are they?”

“Niesnaiyoh, Gosp. . . .”

“Then go and get them, damn you, go and get them!”

A sound as of weeping. Then the high-pitched voice said :

“This is damn well not good enough. This young devil says someone has stolen my trousers. Ach, you young devil, go and get my trousers!”

I lifted a child's book printed in Russian characters, but illustrated by German pictures of German children, beasts, birds, railway trains, fishes, fairies. Gospodin Capitan was making a noise like a she-wolf robbed of her whelps. I

wondered who this bereaved Captain might be, and what wonderfully cunningly fashioned trousers were those that had been filched from him. I judged him to belong to the Indian Army and to have been, until lately, the possessor of such strange trousers as such officers employ—to wit, with great baggy upper parts, with the relic of the antique codpiece in front, and with the lower part fitting tightly the shin and shapely calf and knee, with pipeclayed buff strapping; the whole made of some form of mercerized silk and of gaudy colours; trousers of a shape seldom seen in this country except decorating the persons of humorists on the stage, who add, usually, spats, a scarlet nose, and a little hat with a partridge plume. I wondered if Gospodin Capitan would shortly appear wearing every detail of this costume but the essentials. But I put the thought from my mind, and considered instead the pride and dignity of trousers; and how the trouser wearers punish and dominate and enslave those unfortunate human beings who, for racial or other reasons, wear no such garments. I thought of the Romans, the Vikings, the Turks, and the modern European, and of how England was never greater than when, in the spacious days of Queen Elizabeth, her soldiers and sailors and poets wore enormous trousers all padded out with

wool and newspapers. And while I was thinking thus idly, the Captain appeared.

He was wearing riding breeches, much patched and darned, with ordnance boots and puttees. An ill-fitting puggaree jacket clothed his body, and his shoulder straps proclaimed that he was a Captain in the Indian Medical Service. He was slightly squat in figure, had a somewhat bilious complexion, curly black hair, and a noble profile. Twitching his nose like a contemptuous rabbit, he said :

“ Good evening. That little devil says someone has stolen my trousers, but I believe the little devil has pawned them. Y’know you can’t trust these little devils as far as you could toss them. By the way, my name is Theodorus. How do you do ? Will you have a drink or something ? ”

Theodorus could speak Russian very well, and was so socially gifted that he seldom had to dine in mess. His manner with his Russian hosts was gently tyrannical ; but they appeared to count his brusqueness as an English virtue, and he was highly popular. I believe that he could trace his descent to an ancient Armenian family. At all events, when guests of the mess used to foam and fulminate over the iniquities of that tragic race, Theodorus used sweetly and reasonably to defend it.

Once, I remember, there was a strike in Baku.

The British troops were confined to barracks, and messed by the light of oil lamps. The workers at the power station were also on strike. The strike was a protest against something or other.

We sat in our flat playing bridge in groups, and all was peace except for an occasional far-away shot from the Tartar town. On a sudden the air was disturbed by the pullulation of an advancing mob and the shriek of a police whistle. Nearer the sound grew till it was well below our windows ; and then, over the falsetto tumult of Turquee, Tartar, Arabic, Persian, Armenian, and Russian, we heard spoken and repeated a lamentable oath of which our own soldiery were all too fond. We went out to the balcony.

By the dim light of our windows we could see a fantastic riot in the street below. It was composed mainly of men in light cotton suits and astrakhan hats, and some Tartar women fluttered round its outskirts squealing. Round the outskirts also ran a policeman of the Azerbaijan Constabulary, alternately blowing his whistle and clicking his rifle bolt. In the centre of the riot were two drivers of the Royal Army Service Corps, who were obviously being molested by the crowd. We went downstairs.

Legend, like a practical man, promptly kicked the Azerbaijan policeman in the stomach and confiscated his rifle. The crowd parted to let us

see the soldiers, who, being disencumbered of foes, began furiously to attack a drunken Russian sailor, striking him in the English fashion with their fists till I called upon them to stop, and ordered them to barracks. But you should have seen Theodorus? He had provided himself with a heavy stick, and with this he charged the mob, damaging a harmless Mussulman with every rapidly succeeding blow. To right and left, and up and down he swung his stick, roaring the while in a terrible voice :

“ TAKE THAT AND THAT, YOU BLOODY TARTAR DOG ! ”

The worshippers of Mahound wavered—broke—and faded like thistledown into the air. We were alone. But from the dim street end we yet heard cries and the thump of Theodorus's stick.

Next morning : “ Sir ”, said Driver Pook, “ me and my friend proceeded to the road end at about 9 p.m. to tell the Gloucester sentry what was a friend of ours that we was not going on demob to-morrow. As we was sitting on the parapet a Russian man approached and asked for a drink, using the words ‘ Da mi vino ’, or words to that effect. I lifted him off the parapet on to the road quite gently, when he suddenly struck Driver Bean, my mate, on the nose, which made it bleed, sir. Of course, sir, then I beat

him and he began to cry out, and next thing we knew we was surrounded by a crowd, and a Azzy Bejan policeman, sir, covered us with his rifle, and prevented us from proceeding quietly to our billet ”.

2

Theodorus had a delicious little fat chuckle ; a foxy grandpa chuckle ; a chuckle delivered with downcast face and upward sideways looking eyes and a cheerful puppydog air ; a genial sly chuckle bubbling from a soul happy in the knowledge of a thing or two. He reserved it for rare occasions—as when he danced an elephantine Lesginka, or told of G.S.O.I.’s overreached or of how, if he had had his way, he would have won the great European War in 1915.

“ As a matter of fact ”, said Theodorus, snorting through his nose, “ I said to the Brigadier, ‘ LOOK HERE, SIR. Why don’t you bring over a few native villages and plant them behind the firing line ? You could run ’em up in a week. And then the Sepoys would go back and have a proper rest, and buck to their pals and tell their women all about it. It would put some heart into them.’ ”

One night as we sat in our parlour all silent and all damned, Theodorus was heard chuckling in the vestibule, and presently appeared.

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“ Look here, you fellows ”, he said. “ Do any of you know anything about adenoids ? ”

We all knew a great deal about adenoids.

“ Well, as a matter of fact ”, said Theodorus, “ there’s rather a pretty girl here who wants to consult an Anglisky doctor about her adenoids, and I don’t know much about the damned things. Shall I bring her in ? ”

A radiant creature with something of the gait of a thoroughbred foal, but with none of its self-consciousness, advanced into the room.

“ This is Isabella ”, said Theodorus.

Isabella was tall with a round infantile face, a short nose, a baby mouth, and great black eyes. She had short black curls and a large flapping black hat. She was eighteen, she told us in Russian (she knew no English), and she was Zhedovka, a daughter of Jephthah, Judge of Israel, we thought. At one moment she was a grande dame, at another a vampire, at a third an orphan child, and the collected effrontery of the flapper sustained all these impersonations and carried them off triumphantly. She asked us our names and ages as she shook hands with us, and we all looked sheepish except little Billee, who blushed in the most beautiful way you can possibly conceive.

“ I like them pretty well ”, she said to

Theodorus. "They are all very nice except for Mister Genree's socks. *They* are disgusting."

The socks were not at all disgusting, but such as the women of England made for the lads at the wars. That is, they were rough and corrugated, and made the wearer look like a cochinchina fowl or a noble Clydesdale horse.

"To-morrow evening, when I return, I shall bring a pretty pair", said Isabella, "and give them to you, Mister Genree."

She then went over to the piano, and we expected her to enchant our ears as she had our eyes, for the Russian Jew is very musical, as is well known. She played, however, "Tipperary" with one finger, and that not well. One of us sat down beside her and taught her how to play it properly or in a recognizable fashion, and thus half an hour passed. Then a rival found some chocolates for Isabella, and the music-master was deserted. It was as if a stray kitten had wandered into a cook-house. We watched her intently as she ate chocolate, and were very pleased that she could.

Plunkett came in and said that dinner was served. Isabella thought it a ridiculous hour to have dinner, but came in with us. As Plunkett served the soup, she looked at him with large wondering eyes, and then suddenly broke into a ravishing smile of a sort that would have made

St. Anthony drop the tureen. Plunkett blushed and fled from the room. He was discomposed for the first time in a trying period of servitude. Isabella turned to me.

“ He is very beautiful ”, she said.

Franciscus came in at this point, and he could speak Russian like a native, which, in a fashion, he was, having been born in Vladikavkas. Theodorus had gone out, in his unceremonious way, to dine with Madame L——, so Isabella was delighted to find someone to whom she could speak something other than baby or kitten language. Melodious madness flowed from her lips while the whole world listened. “ What does she say? What does she say? ” asked Little Billee, spilling his wine on the tablecloth.

She told Franciscus a funny story or riddle that she had heard from a dashing young Jew of her family circle. It was something about a donkey going down a steep place to drink out of a river: I forget the point. It seemed very funny at the time, and made us all laugh. Marbas, who was afflicted with a slight impediment of speech, tried to get Franciscus to tell her the story of the wee boy and the postman and the calf. It was Marbas’s sovereign test for a sense of humour. But nobody paid any attention to him. Isabella next told Franciscus

that it was a new and quaint experience to dine with English officers.

"On the whole, I like them", said Isabella.

She made a rough classification of the young men round the table. Ayporos was sympathetic (sympatichny); Marbas too was sympathetic; Little Billee was beautiful (krassivy); Gamin (who was most polite to her) was a dwarfish fellow, very like an Armenian; Bileth was proud; Muckle was beautiful. . . .

"But, young lady", said Ayporos in his vile pidgin Russian, "is not Muckle also sympatheticny?"

"If one is beautiful", said Isabella, "it is not necessary to be sympatheticny!"

When we had finished dinner, Isabella went to the telephone and rang up her mother, to whom she told a pack of lies about a friend called Katusha, whose father, mother, brother, and cousin had gone out to a conversazione and who, terrified at being left alone in the dangerous city, and suffering, moreover, from migraine, had begged Isabella to sit with her for at least part of the evening. She then returned to the ante-room, and sat down with the air of one wishing and expecting to be entertained.

It so happened that the final round of the Indian wrestling championship of the mess fell to be fought off that night. In Indian wrestling

the combatants lie down on the ground, hieds and thraws, with the right arm of the one locked in the right arm of the other. They then raise the right leg to a perpendicular position and attempt to overturn each the other by pulling the opposing leg over till the toes touch the ground behind its owner's head. It is a dangerous sport, with a dislocated neck as one of its possibilities, and bruising of the ankle-bone is a common accident. Again, if one of the combatants is a cavalryman, wears corduroy breeches, and has a trick of rolling over and sitting on the face of his opponent, a corrugated face and a split lip may easily happen to the unfortunate man. Isabella thought it fine, and very exciting. The local sport of her home town is massacre, and is poor fun for lady players. She made rapid arrangements with young Orobas (who takes afternoon tea with old ladies), and then retired alone into the C.O.'s bedroom and locked the door. In ten minutes she returned, dressed in Orobas's white drill jacket and grey flannel trousers. Her hair, as I have said, was short and curly, and she looked much better than Vesta Tilley or Hetty King. Ayporos and Marbas were in the midst of a strenuous bout, but she pulled Ayporos away, and, lying down, defeated Marbas in three successive tourneys. On that eventful night Isabella became lady champion Indian

wrestler of Baku. When she had tired of it, she stood on one foot and picked up a handkerchief from the ground with her teeth, crawled round a chair to remove a pin from its foreleg, and altogether displayed such energy and skill that everyone was enchanted.

In due course Theodorus returned from his party, just as, I am ashamed to say, we were all getting a little tired of Isabella, and bore her home to her relatives.

The next night was a guest night, and the flat was full of distinguished people. It was all very "Good evening, sir", and we listened respectfully while one colonel told another how he met Old Boodle in Bloemfontein in 1900, and how even then he was a perfect fool. When dullness had reached a dead and hopeless level, who should come in, unannounced and benignant, but Isabella, with a pair of beastly little black silk socks for Henry Ayporos. She quickly became the life and soul of the party. The colonels had never seen anything like it in Bloemfontein.

We had the privilege of entertaining Isabella many times after that. She dropped in to tea, to tiffin, and to dinner. She came to the opera with us. If she got a new dress she came in to show it to us. If she passed an examination, as all the youth of Baku appeared to do at frequent intervals, she invited us to rejoice with her.

When she was appointed a stenographer under the Government of Azerbaijan she came to tell us of it during a meal interval which lasted two and a half hours. When she was dismissed from the appointment she did not repine. Isabella was eating a jam tart which she had just bought, when the Minister of the Interior entered the office. He was an old aged Tartar with a fur hat, a fat stomach, and a red nose. He took no notice of Isabella, but began to talk earnestly to the head clerk. If there was one thing Isabella could not stand, it was being taken no notice of. The gaping pocket of the Minister's overcoat was within easy reach of Isabella's table, and into that pocket Isabella put the large, sticky jam tart. A few moments later the Minister put his hand into the pocket to draw forth an important State document . . .

There is a certain stage at which the visitations of an angel out of heaven begin to become an infernal nuisance. After a few weeks our mascot became appreciably less popular in our little home. We began to look forward to her arrivals without delight, even with horror. And he to whom she was perhaps least welcome was Little Billee. The capricious Isabella would often sit for long, long minutes gazing at Little Billee, saying nothing and thinking her strange thoughts. At these times the mantling blush was seldom

absent from Little Billee's cheek, and he would call aloud for someone to throw Isabella into the street from the balcony, like Jezebel. She was a sad interruption to bridge too, for it was a game for which she had no enthusiasm. Her visits withered under the chill, and became shorter and more infrequent.

The day before we left Baku we were playing bridge when Isabella appeared. One or two of us said: "How do, Isabella?" but Little Billee ground his teeth and muttered an oath. Isabella was wearing a brand-new dress, but there were now no shouts of admiration. It was an interesting hand. Little Billee revoked, was dummy next hand, and got up and left the room.

Isabella looked after him and lifted her chin. Then she said in Russian: "Well, good-bye, all. I hope Little Billee gets a good wife". Then she went away. The British left Baku, and none of us ever saw her again.

CHAPTER XII

THE PAX BRITTANICA

IF you meet in this narrative so much as a single page pretending to be authentic, look it in the page-title fixedly for some moments and it will wilt. Whether my stories are true in part or wholly does not concern me in the least, and need not you. My power of invention is feeble, and most of my stories are founded on fact ; but no pedant who lived through any of my incidents need put himself to the trouble of unmasking this liar. In mere little pretty matters of entertainment, if a lie will serve let us use it, stick by it if necessary, and desert it without apology if the man with the inch-tape so much as clears his throat.

British prestige in Baku and South Russia generally grew to its full flower in the beginning of 1919, and was ultimately destroyed by Mr. Lloyd George's Government towards the end of that year. The question of whether Mr. George's Government could help it does not arise here ; but from the end of 1919 the name of Great Britain was MUD in these interesting and

turbulent lands. Everybody who believes that Great Britain is not a small island in the North Sea, bounded on one side by the Co-operative movement and on the other by the Rothermere syndicate, should read a book entitled "In Denikin's Russia", written by Mr. Bechofer and published by Messrs. Collins. The book tells the truth about post-war Transcaucasia in the most engaging and annoying manner, and is concerned mainly with the loss of our prestige in that region. I should like to write for a little about its growth.

The Russian is a great critic. When the British troops came to Baku the Russian criticized them. He said they drank too much. This did not mean that he preferred abstinent warriors who murdered civilians, took bribes, and were plastered with filth, like the Turks; or arrogant soldiers who reserved the side-walk for their own use, like the Germans; or disgruntled soldiers who flew into passions like the French; or cowardly soldiers who preferred parading the streets covered with gold-leaf and lacquer to fighting, like the men of . . . It simply meant that, from the high abstract point of view invariably held by your Russian, the English soldier was deficient in true self-control during his scanty spare time. Reasoning by comparison with the facts of life never appealed to a Russian; and it is to the credit

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of Atkins that later on and for a time he rose to a standard in local Russian opinion that the Archangel Michael would have been hard put to it to attain. He drank. It was beside the question that the Russian soldier drank more ; that Mr. Atkins's private morality and public sociability were high above anything that had been seen in the neighbourhood ; that he was, at great personal inconvenience, saving the Russian from starvation and massacre. He was a drunkard.

There was a faint colour of truth in the charge. The soldiers had come from Mesopotamia—these miles of damn-all with a ditch in the middle—where the strongest drink obtainable by a private was a very occasional go of bland Japanese rice-beer. They found in Baku brain-stealers that bit like serpents and stung like adders. I refer to Kavkas brandy and the vodka of the country. For a month or so in the second occupation there was some drunkenness ; but the phase passed, and honest, well-washed, well-clothed, well-booted, pink-faced, friendly Mr. Atkins conquered the town, and everybody whom he did not regard (in his quaint processes of ethnological selection) as a nigger fell in love with him. One thing about him they failed to understand. The British soldier, take him as a type, does not usually rob the Hybla bees of

their buzzing and threat before he hits. Among the older and Eastern civilizations, where all things are done decently and in order, it is usual to preface a fight with a properly rounded quarrel and to progress through seemly stages to the ultimate slapping, biting, and stabbing. Nor are the fists or ammunition boots admired weapons of offence. It was no uncommon thing for a large Slav seaman, full of vodka and spoiling for a fight, to enter into preliminaries with Thomas. At the stage when in his normal combats a few mutual pushes would have been warming the participators and the bystanders to the matter in hand, a heavy knobbed fist would hit him on the ear, another would reach his sensitive nose, and a large hobnailed boot would begin to make rapid play on his posterior. There was a feeling that this might be magnificent, but it was *pas la guerre*, and the seaman would retire early from a game so opposed to his sense of the fitness of things.

I have seen British military police throwing Russian Tartars and Georgians of all ranks from a café. All the ejectees were heavily armed, many of them were men of undoubted valour, but after the first three or four had struck the mid landing and the pavement in successive throws, the remainder went like young virgins to a confirmation. It was wonderful. Fights

were moderately frequent ; the troops wore their sidearms while walking in the town ; but the General told me—and I believe him—that from our arrival till the day we left, not a British bayonet had left its scabbard save in the way of ceremony. It is a good record.

Here is a story.

An ex-soldier of the Czar's army was taking the air on the Boulevard. He had a shaven head, a flapping collar open at the neck like the poet Byron's, a tweed jacket, high-heeled shoes, and a little ribbon in his buttonhole—the ribbon of the Order of St. Stanislaus. As he walked high and disposedly, a little Azerbaijan policeman accosted him and asked him by what authority he wore his decoration.

"I won it on the field of glory", said the Russian.

The policeman explained that, by an edict of the Azerbaijan Government of no later than a week past, no one might wear decorations without a permit from the Minister of the Fount of All Honour, Public and Private (or some such functionary).

"You had better take it off", said the policeman.

"Strewth!" said the Russian, thus using a perfectly good Russian oath, "this is tyranny!" And he began to argue the point, as Russians will.

The argument attracted a small crowd, and the crowd attracted a Tartar police officer all green and gold with a pistol and a sabre and little gilt spurs. He made no bones about the matter, but tore the ribbon from the Russian's chest. There were loud protests from the crowd. The police officer's moustache began to bristle. More policemen trotted up. It was a highly charged situation. At this moment a splendid fellow appeared. He was a cossack from the Urals, an officer in the volunteer army. He walked on his heels in a graceful, gliding fashion, and his back was as straight as a lance. His chest shone with polished silver cartouches, a great kinjal dangled from his belt buckle, a Browning automatic hung at his hip. He wore the George, the Vladimir, and the Anne. He had an eye like a peregrine falcon's, and with that eye he swept the crowd. He made a noise like: "Ettashtoettatakoi, gospodin politsmaestre?" and jerked back his glorious little head.

The Tartar took quick stock of the situation. He had now twelve policemen at his back, all clicking the bolts of their rifles. By this time there were three other Russians, all wearing decorations, grouped round the Cossack and the ill-used ex-service man. The Tartar did not hesitate. He tore the decorations from the cossack officer and from his three allies, formed

them up between six files of his myrmidons, and marched them off towards the common clink.

Some seconds later the procession was met by Private Dick of the North Staffordshire Regiment. He was a squab little man with parenthesis legs. He was armed with a side-arm and a Wills cigarette and wore the brand-new brassard of a Regimental Policeman. He saw the Tartar, his sabre drawn, his abdomen swelling with arrogance, marching in front of his captive. He saw that the captives, Cossack and all, were dishevelled and in tears.

"What's this here?" he asked.

The Cossack, who could speak some English, poured out his story—how he and these others had been peacefully walking the Boulevard when this pig Mussulman had shamed them before the mob, had torn from them the medals they had won fighting for the Allies on the field of glory, and had wrongfully arrested them for no crime.

Private Dick did not know what to do. He stood on the kerbstone with his eyes full of puzzlement. At this point the importance of the occasion drove the Tartar mad. He gave Private Dick a push with the hilt of his sabre, saying, "Fellow, let me pass", or words to that effect. Private Dick knew what to do.

He struck the Tartar officer hard on the face

so that he sat down suddenly in the gutter. The first Tartar policeman brought his rifle to the ready and had it wrenched from his hands and was clouted about the head with it. A second Tartar policeman was also clouted about the head and a third was heavily kicked behind. The remainder fled. Private Dick then removed the passive Tartar officer from the gutter by the scruff of the neck and marched him to the office of the Allied Commissioner of Police.

Before this epical affair of Private Dick, British soldiers of higher rank had been no less successful in impressing their personalities on the inhabitants. The story of "How the Quartermaster Stopped the War" will illustrate this. It was only an incident in the climb of our moral ascendancy.

A little while after our troops had settled in Baku for the second time, a Mission was sent to Tiflis to meet the troops of the Salonika Force who were penetrating Transcaucasia from the Batoum end. The Mission was under the command of a major who had been, and still is, I hope, a schoolmaster, and had with it a quartermaster. The Mission found the breeze blowing a typhoon in Tiflis. The wealthy profiteers were packing up to leave. The poorer people were running about with horror-stricken faces. Several soldiers of Georgia might have been observed

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getting into civilian kits as rapidly as possible. It appeared that an enormous Armenian army was advancing to the sack of Tiflis and was barely ten miles distant. The populace rightly considered that the presence of a Georgian army in its path did not much influence the situation. A panic was growing and spreading. The arrival of a couple of platoons of Royal Scots from Batoum did a little, but not much, to allay it. The Major told the Quartermaster that he had better take a serjeant and a dozen men and go to see what he could do with the Armenians. So off the Quartermaster went.

After some hours they came to the midst of a great plain in the centre of which was a little col, and on either side of which, two great armies were deployed and apparently digging-in to the accompaniment of desultory shell and rifle fire. B—— moved to the top of the col and bade his men take off their equipment and sit down. He himself lit his pipe and waited. The firing ceased and B—— felt the scrutiny of hundreds of pairs of field-glasses. It was a nice day. The sky was blue.

By and by, an officer waving a white flag galloped out from each of the firing lines and made for B——. They pointed out that a battle was about to commence; that B—— was in No Man's Land—a good spot for seeing the fight,

but dangerous ; that he and his men would infallibly get hurt ; that . . .

B—— said, " Send your Generals out to me. Don't you see I'm a BRITISH OFFICER ? "

The envoys held a short conference. Very well, they said, if B—— would guarantee that there would be no treachery on either side.

" There had better not be ", said B——, and the envoys galloped back again. In due time the Generals fussed up in powerful motor-cars.

They were both glad to see the British here, they said, but a particularly awkward spot had been chosen for their bivouac. They would hate if B—— got hurt. . . .

" I had better not be hurt ", said B——, " and if one of my men is so much as scratched, I'm sorry for both of you, that's all. As for this place, it's all right. I like the view and I'm going to stop here."

The Generals asked his permission to withdraw for a short talk. The old fellows stood with their heads close together and talked like a couple of brothers. At last they came back to B——.

" What do you want us to do ? " asked the Armenian General.

" Ah, now you're talking ", said B——. " Let me see. It is now half-past two. I want each of you to retire to billets ten miles away in

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diametrically opposite directions. I want you to be in those billets by sundown. You have just time."

"Very well", said the Generals, and it was so.

That is how my friend B—— saved Tiflis from being sacked and its handsome, but worthless, inhabitants from being massacred, and how he stopped in half an hour a great war between the ancient nations of Armenia and Georgia, waged with about 20,000 bayonets a side somewhere south of the Great Pipe Line. I believe the King gave him an M.B.E. for it.

Many a time during our somewhat pointless occupation of these regions, young stockbrokers, clerks or schoolmasters or solicitors were sent two or three hundred miles away among the savage people who dance to pistol shots and can ride at full gallop with a hand on the ground and a foot in the surcingle and to whom blood feuds are the only law. To those savage people, the young men introduced the primary ideas of good sense and good government (though where they themselves learnt such ideas, God knows) stopped wars, stopped robbery, stopped raids, started trade—there is no end to what a young British citizen can do if you put three stars on his shoulder and do not hamper him with orders. It is said that a young captain went by himself to Batoum, a disaffected, dirty, quarrelsome,

polyglot, shiftless, treacherous, murderous place. He walked down the main street and when he saw a decently dressed man, stopped him and said :

“ What is your name ? What is your occupation ? A banker ? Very well, then. Come to my hotel at 9 a.m. to-morrow. You shall be Minister of Finance in the Government I am now forming.”

His thirty-second judgments were mostly correct and he formed an admirable Cabinet, resolute and moderately honest, which stood the test of a reasonably long time.

It is only such circumstances that the British genius for government is allowed to show itself. The British politician is almost always a man with a hysterical lust for displaying himself in public. His qualifications to rule are either the possession of large sums of money, or the ability to make speeches with an emotional appeal. He is essentially un-British, to use no harsher term. In the Parliamentary system, he excludes or overrides all others ; and it is only when he is too indolent to interfere, or is even ignorant of their situation on the map, that subordinate employees of the State have a chance to do really good work. The British Empire owes its existence to the stupidity, ignorance, and indifference of the Tory Party.

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When I said all this to the Polkovnik, he said it was sheer damned nonsense, and where could we get a Liberal politician like Sir Edward Carson?

I said I thought the British were very good at dealing with "natives" for this reason: that all Europeans treat "natives" like dogs, but that the English alone of all peoples treat dogs properly.

The Polkovnik said, "Well, you have made a fine mess of Ireland, anyhow".

Legend said, "You are talking foolishness".

It was not that we were a mess of imbeciles, but sometimes the conversation dried a bit and dribbled. . . .

And so by an affectation affected by the publicist, Wells, we return to the point at issue. . . .

As it was with the little, so it was with the great. I remember the morning when we took over the Bolshevescent ships.

The town had been growing irritating. Night after night, the Tartar police were letting off their rifles more and more often, for the same reason that impels our own police to blow their whistles—to keep themselves warm and in good heart, and to show they don't give a damn for the public. The volunteer army in the Saliansky Barrack were becoming daily more grumpy

and insolent. The restaurateurs were further from promptitude in their service. The Azerbaijani developed even filthier manners than before. And worse still, gangs of Russian sailors full of vodka began to strike at British soldiers with knives; to hold and address meetings; to sing the Internationale and a quaint song called "The Apple", which I believe is popular among the Red Guards. These sailors manned the remnant of the Caspian flotilla which lay at anchor in Baku harbour. They were most of them frank Bolsheviks and badly behaved young men. The flotilla consisted of six or seven armed oil tankers and was under the command of a big sallow youth who wore a snow-white Cossack uniform, called himself an Admiral, and was not particular about saluting British officers.

One night, or so I am told, General Thomson told the General of the Volunteer Army that he must go away and fight for Denikin. The General said that he would be only too pleased and was prepared to enter into *pourparlers* preparatory to beginning to think of making arrangements for the transport northwards of his troops at an early date. He was, when I saw him, an unwashed old man in a pale blue dressing-gown, and he had fierce, burning eyes and hands like the claws of a bird of prey. He was the hero of Erzeroum, they tell me. General

Thomson was a well-washed young man with a jaw like an Ethel M. Dell hero and the kindly eyes of a sportsman. I forget what his hands were like. He had already thought of—and made—arrangements and his D.A.D.R.T. packed the whole volunteer army on board trains and dispatched them to Denikin that night. He was a capable, fat man, the D.A.D.R.T. We called him the D.D.O.S. (or Dear Disgraceful Old Scoundrel), when we laughed alone. And so, as silently as they had been Arabs, the volunteer army stole, or were stolen away.

It was a nice morning. There was a light mist over the bar, but apart from that, the eighteen-pounders, which came cantering up the hill past our flat, were getting a fine day for it. They unlimbered on a terrace fifty yards behind our hospital, and sighted on the Admiral's flagship. At the same time, the infantry lined the Boulevard overlooking the quays, where the ships lay at anchor, and fiddled meaningly with their machine guns. It was then intimated to the Admiral that he must hand over his ships to our Commodore by noon precisely.

The Admiral lay out in the fairway. After a pause for reflections and, one presumes, a consultation with the stoker and the sick bay steward, he is said to have sent word that his guns were trained on British Headquarters,

and that, on the first threat of violence, he would blow General Thomson and his Staff to hell. Five coastal motor boats armed with torpedoes and depth charges slid semicircularly out into the bay. The morning dragged on. That portion of the population of Baku which was not under a curse to talk eternally held its breath.

At five minutes to twelve, General Thomson advised the Admiral to hurry up. The Admiral was observed to be upping anchor. The hacbutiers blew on their matches. At twelve noon, the flags of the ships in dock came down with a run. On the flagship a pennant still flew proudly. Lieutenant X——, in his little C.M.B., was observed to be making for the Admiral full tilt. At 12.1 p.m. Lieutenant X—— fired a torpedo from twenty yards and missed. At 12.1½ he fired another torpedo and missed again. As the messenger of death cut the water, the Admiral's anchor and the Admiral's flag came down simultaneously, but not before an enraged Lieutenant had fired a revolver at the perturbed Admiral on his quarter-deck and missed a third time. It was a bloodless victory. In half an hour the troops were in billets, the sailors had been arrested and released, and the white ensign flew on the captive ships.

That night a baby with its neurasthenic grand-

mamma could have walked the streets of Baku. Over all was the silence of Gilead after closing time, broken only by the happy song of a stray Atkins returning to his billet. Next day such little gentlemen as the Tartars were, you never saw in your life !

I could tell hundreds of stupid little stories with my fellow-countrymen as the modest, good-natured, and occasionally slightly violent heroes of them. One picture is shrouded in my memory by mists of happy tears. It shows an A.P.M., a sturdy little red-faced man in spectacles, enforcing the orders of his General on a turbulent and stiff-necked generation.

When the Cossack officers, at the sweet of the night, used to dance in the Kazino, it was their habit to reinforce the orchestra and the rhythmical hand-claps of the audience, by firing revolvers. A bullet fired by a drunken man in a confined space is apt to find other billets than the floor or the ceiling. Members of the Staff, supping at the Kazino found their digestion impaired by the flight of friendly small-arm projectiles. The General ordered that British officers should leave their revolvers in the vestibule, and that any other firing a pistol in the Kazino should have his weapon confiscated. My memory shows the vestibule of the Kazino crowded with a mob of excited Babel-builders of both sexes. In a little ring stand face to face, smartly at attention,

and furiously angry, Nobby, the A.P.M. and a huge Kuban Cossack, curled, scented, and spitting venom. Round them dances a little flying officer talking anxious French, a tongue in the use of which Nobby and the Cossack are far from proficient.

The Cossack says in a voice like a bull's: "Je suis Russky officier! Ponimaïetz? Russky officier!"

Nobby replies in a voice like two bulls': "Je suis English officier! Le General a absolooming defendu fuer le revolvair dans les places publiques. Donnez-moi votre revolver. Tout de suite. Vous ne pouvez pas fuer une revolver dans le Kazino. C'est damn well defendu, and you know it!"

The Cossack responds: "Slushite, godpodin capitan, je—suis—Russky officier!"

Nobby replies: "Je ne donnay pas une damn si vous êtes Russky Tsar, ou Lenin, ou Trotsky. Le Commandant Anglais a dit. . . ."

Nobby's assistant, a large gunner subaltern and an ex-serjeant-major turns to me: "Nobby'll stand there parley-vooïn' all night. He rather fancies his French. The bloke that really fired the shot is upstairs. We'll just go up".

We ascend. The D.A.P.M. opens two or three doors, and from one there issues a little Tartar officer, very polite, who begins to explain in Russian.

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To him the D.A.P.M. : " I don't understand a word you're saying ; but if that pistol isn't on this table in two minutes (he takes out his watch and holds up two fingers), I'll run you and your pal in there into clink ".

Another large Cossack strides out of the room, glares at the D.A.P.M. and me, and retires into the room again. The little Tartar follows him. In about forty seconds he returns with the revolver. The D.A.P.M., grumbling through his moustache, writes a receipt. The voices of Nobby and his enemies still rise from the vestibule.

" Have a drink, Doctor ", says the D.A.P.M.

SIXTH INTERLUDE

THE CARPET MERCHANTS

From Senna, Daghestan, Kazian, Shiraz,
On forty thousand camels with golden bells
Across the burning sands the merchants came
And sat upon the floor and talked to us,
And answered our abuse with pleasant smiles,
Day in, day out, the livelong afternoon,
Showing us carpets wrought in cheap Berlin
And dyed with aniline and printers' ink :
But ever and anon unrolled a piece
As God unrolls a smiling land in Spring,
When a March shower has passed across its face.

And shimmering on the silken surfaces
The little fowls began to sing for joy ;
The flowerets gay to blossom on a ground
Of hyacinth, while writhing monsters crawled
From marge to marge, and square-faced antelopes
Bounded from hill to hill ; and twisted prayers
To stern-browed Allah wrote themselves in blood.
Then said the merchant : " Mistar, it is cheap.
And hunderd, tousand steetches to de inch.
And sheen. And starri. Kharosché tapis.
Regardez ! Mistar ! Aighty-five toman ! "

V

BAKU

CHAPTER XIII

"What do you want with a canary in a strange land."

Free translation of a Latin tag.

WHEN O'Hara, the Irishman, was brought over from Krasnovodsk nine-tenths dead of typhus, he flickered his eyelids at Marbas and me, for he hadn't the strength to open them. "Anything doin' in this town?" he asked. There was the opera.

The Opera House was a long low building with a tunnel roof. Its decoration was drab and polite, and its seats were less comfortable than they might have been, but were inexpensive. A stall cost about fourpence at the market rate, and one could hear "L'Ebrea" and "The Queen of Spades" and "The Demon" for the price of one cup of coffee and a liqueur glass of ardent spirit. The entr'actes lasted for about

three-quarters of an hour, and during this time the shaven students, and harnessed Cossack officers and spectacled professors and grisly artisans and dewlapped millionaires and bobbed beauties walked up and down and round and round at a steady two and a half miles an hour.

The artistes were excellent and laborious people. The principals were few in number and able for anything. In one week I saw Gucassoff, the adorable tenor, sing the parts of Rodolfo in "La Bohème", the naval gentleman in the "Geisha", "Faust", Rhadames (if that is the name of the tenor in "Aida"), and a humorous part in a burlesque. Orda, a baritone, sang in one week the parts of Mephistopheles, Figaro, Rigoletto, Boris, and the three bad men in the "Tales of Hoffman", and a very good shape he made at all of them. On the evenings when they were not singing in opera, the principals performed at concerts, at music-halls and at charity assemblies. They also sat up till early in the morning and drank vodka. The season lasted for about seven months, and performances were given on Sundays.

The Chorus, I suspect, cleaned the theatre when they were not on the stage. They were a round dozen or so of moujik-looking persons and their wives, and they were strengthened by whatever of the lesser lights did not happen to be singing important parts during the evening.

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The moujiks were dressed in rusty black trousers, heavy boots and dress coats, with ham-frills round their necks, for such dramas as "Eugene Onegin", "Werther", "Traviata", and the modern comic opera. For "Rigoletto", the "Huguenots" and "Faust", they pulled red stockings over their trousers, put on green tunics with red sleeves, and stamped in with their scavengers' boots. The ladies wore the same costume for everything—a chaste semi-evening gown of the early nineties. They were pleasant, motherly people.

The noblest figure in the chorus was one who came to be known to us as the Bull of Bashan. He was a stout, old, tall, bald man, with no teeth and a face like the petticoat of Beelzebub's wife. At a given signal he would open his toothless face and emit a noise resembling the confused roar of an aeroplane, or the call of a rhinoceros to its mate, or the cry of the coal merchant in the street where I was born. It could not be technically called a "musical sound", but it was a heartening row, and the British soldiers in the pit applauded whenever the Bull gave tongue. He loved the stage. Whether he was a courtier or a warrior, or a villager or a priest he felt the part, though he never by any chance looked it. Once he had two or three bars to sing by himself in "Aida". He was a guards-

man or something. After he had sung his lines and had retired to the obscurity of the back row, a great hush seemed to fall over the opera. Many of us left after the second act.

The orchestra also earned its living. The musician with the bass viol lived somewhere in the tenements beyond our flat. At midday he carried his ponderous instrument to the Hotel Metropole and played there till four. At four he bore it to the Chaski Chai and played for afternoon tea till half-past five. At half-past five he played solos in a little low restaurant where the hat was handed round. At half-past seven he took his viol to the opera and played there till midnight. At midnight he betook himself to the Kazino Cabaret and accompanied the singers till half-past two or three in the morning. From three onwards he played in the Kazino wild South Russian airs, while the Cossacks danced and shouted and clapped their hands and fired revolvers. At half-past six the early riser could see him festinating drowsily up the Nicolaivskaya with his viol on his shoulder, seeking his bed in the cool dawn.

The lessee and manager of the Opera House was called Amirago. He had grey hair and was the only citizen I saw in Baku who could wear evening clothes properly. He was understood to be desperately wicked. He played the part

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of Prince Danilo in the "Merry Widow" in a style reminiscent of Arthur Roberts, and spoke his songs, for the years had stolen his singing voice.

Gucassoff, the tenor, was an Armenian. He was tall and slim with a hooked nose, and eyebrows that went up diagonally over his bald brow and almost met in the middle. He sang like a sucking dove in his love scenes and like a fierce tom-cat in his others. We called him Nyet, because the Russian version of "Faust" begins with that word, and he uttered it with the most stentorian mew you can possibly imagine. He walked always on tiptoe with his arms outspread, palms downward, and elbows crooked, and he wore on most occasions the sweetest expression of countenance; but, when he was counterfeiting rage, he was at once pitiful and terrible. I remember well the night when a middle-aged mezzo-soprano had journeyed from Tiflis to play Carmen to Nyet's Don Jose. Madame was rather stout, and Madame, except on her beautiful high notes, was rather short of breath. Nyet's customary Carmen was his wife, an excellent comedienne and dancer, and the best Carmen I have ever seen, for all that she sang no better than an old kettle. She was lissom, strong, young and active, and was well used to Nyet's manner of playing the part. With Madame it was different.

Now, Nyet was determined on that night to play, sing, and if necessary, maul the Tiflis prima donna off the stage. I saw real terror in her eyes, when, in the last act, Nyet withdrew himself to the extreme corner (O.P.) and stood crouching on tiptoe, with his elbows on a level with his shoulders, his eyes blazing, dribbling tears, the foam gathering at the down-drawn corners of his mouth. Then suddenly with a baresark howl he hurled himself, in two steps and a leap, on poor old Carmen. He threw her a couple of yards by the force of his impact, jumped upon her with both feet, dragged her back to her old stance, pummelled, savaged, bruised, and finally stabbed her. I almost think he bit her too. She took her call looking like the dead indeed. On the next night, the carpenter erected a stout serviceable tree right in the middle of the Plaza, and to this the diva clung like the lady in the beautiful picture called Rock of Ages, and the mark of Nyet's grip still showed on her buxom shoulders.

The opera was usually late in beginning, like everything else in that singular town. I think they waited for Mischa. Mischa was Bichera-koff's Cornet, a picturesque young man of nineteen, usually nimnoshka piané, and the life and soul of wherever he went. And he was to be seen everywhere. We saw him at the Kazino

weeping into a large tablecloth in response to the moans of Horrible Hannah, the tragedienne, from the stage; dancing perilously on the ledge of a box twenty-five feet from the ground; conducting the orchestra at a *conversazione*; casting joyous eyes on the ecstatic flappers of the Boulevard; turning to mirth all things of earth as only boyhood could.

When all the opera-goers were seated, Mischa came down the central aisle. He was spiritually drunk. He floated along the coco-nut matting, swaying and balancing on the toes of his flat-soled Wellingtons, waving gracefully to the ladies, saluting politely to the men. He timed his arrival to the moment when the conductor rapped with his baton as a signal for the overture to start. For three minutes or more the whole theatre waited breathless while Mischa asked for the conductor's wife, his little children, and the state of his liver. Then Mischa kissed the conductor, indicated to the orchestra that they might now proceed, bowed to the audience, saluted a friend whom he had not hitherto noticed, and took his seat in the front row of the stalls, breathing brandy and benignity.

Mischa's patronage of the opera showed evidence of his unerring good taste. The opera was the nicest thing in a not very nice city. If in any way this chapter conveys the impression

of a sneer at the courageous artiste who lifted up our hearts for us in the midst of a strange and sordid country, I am sorry. Night after night Russians, Tartars, and Armenians forgot their hunger, poverty, and terror, and we our exile, while these men and women put their whole souls into making beautiful sounds for us. They were no mean artists and they were great people. I wish them well wherever they are.

SEVENTH INTERLUDE

NEW YEAR'S EVE

I

The Franks let cry a gathering of the peers
 To welcome in the year to far Baku.
 And Bileth, Ayporos and Asmodeus,
 Legend and Marbas, Orobas, Amaymom,
 And Litrebili that was young and noble
 Wended with others to the meeting place :
 To a great hall, where paynims and Cossacks
 Frequented to make merry and to dine.
 Upon the roof a crimson-robed Diana
 Sprawled on a woolly sky : on golden walls
 Broad mirrors cried the virtues of Old Sack.
 Musicians made exotic melody
 Far in a curtained pen. And to them spake
 The baron Ayporos ! " Ho ; Maestro, hearken.

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When as the dial's hands creep slowly round
 To midnight, ye shall take your lutes and zithers,
 And play a Chanson of my boyhood's land
 Hight, *Auld Lang Syne!*" But when the hour
 arrived,
 The only Frankish air that they could play
 Was, *Tipperary is a long, long way!*

II

*Dance on the table, dance in the stable,
 Dance on the saddle on the South Trail!*
 The wild men stamped upon the polished floor;
 The kinjals flashed: the maestro's fiddle bow
 Went mad and shook its white Medusa-locks
 Across his shrieking fiddle: and the drum
 Bit on the ear like hail upon a roof.
 Then rose stout Asmodeus in his pride:
 "Give me", he said, "great daggers in my hands,
 And by St. Michael and All Angels I
 Shall dance these knock-kneed felons off their legs!"
 The Cossacks stayed: and Mischa took the baton.
 Donning a monstrous helm of astrakhan
 Bold Asmodeus pranced upon the stage
 Full nimbly bearing his two hundred pounds.
 Then played the fiddlers louder than before,
 And hell was loose and raved about the hall,
 While Asmodeus skipped like any goat,
 And stamped his mighty hooves and shook the stars.
 "Deus!" cried Mischa, "'tis a dance well danced!"
 So he and all his barons gave the charge,
 And fell on Asmodeus. To the roof
 They tossed him, once, twice, thrice, and yet again.
 Till all the buckles of his harness split,
 And ruby fountains jetted from his nose.

Cried Asmodeus, "Hold!" and "Hold!" the
Franks.

Then, beating Asmodeus on the back
And kissing his cheeks so purple and so chub,
The Cossacks bore him to a groaning board
And filled him full of pastry and champagne.
Then came the formidable Cockerill,
The Comitaji's Commandant, and wound
His horn, and stayed the evening's merriment.
And gaily bore we Asmodeus home.
And so to bed. Another year began.

CHAPTER XIV

A SPLASH OF GORE

OUR flat was a most aristocratic flat, but in our lee there lay a huddle of little buildings where artisans and others lived. A small Jenny-a'-Thing's shop which sold kvas and bootlaces and twine and Turkish delight was there, and in the evenings the ladies used to come out and dance to the concertina and the balalaika, while the men and children clapped their hands and sang in tune to the jig. They were a fecund colony and some fifty little mixed children played hopscotch and jingaring all day in front of the shop. Often there was a wedding, and the colony got drunk in the gentle, spiritual South Russian fashion. They had dancing and torches and flowers and eedle-oddle music, and followed the bridal phaeton through the town in great merriment and exaltation of heart. Sometimes there was a funeral, and they would follow the priest, and the Cross—with its tilted foot-bar for the lame Jesus—and the coffin lid and the poor, pale friend with his cold face uncovered from the snow ; and they would weep

heartily but quite pleasantly, and return later to the cafés and get drunk.

One day a young Tartar in a Norfolk suit was arguing with a middle-aged Persian in the shop about who knows what. They rocked about, sitting tailorwise on the dirty rug, and snapped their fingers and shook their heads and frowned. At last the Persian, lapsing from that dignity of speech so characteristic of his race, called the Tartar a son of a dog. The children stopped their hopscotch and clustered round the door. The Tartar retorted on the Persian, who, in his turn, pulled a revolver and fired at the Tartar, missing him, but scattering the curious children. The Tartar escaped by the door and broke across the open for the corner of a small white roughcast house round the edge of which he shot wisely and deliberately at the posts of the shop veranda. The Persian took cover for a little, but, ardently desiring the death of the Tartar, he abandoned caution. He walked across the beaten flat in front of the shop, firing as he went ; and a bullet took him clean in the forehead. The Tartar left the corner of his house, approached to where the Persian lay very still, and placed the muzzle of his pistol against the perforated brow.

I was reading in a shaded bedroom a work by the authoress of "Elizabeth and her German

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Garden", and wondering when tiffin would be ready, when I heard a noise like the slamming of a door repeated five or six times. Then Muckle came in and said to me :

" I have just seen a deliberate and cold-blooded murder."

He said this very solemnly and impressively, but not at all as one would expect a person to make such an announcement. When I had seen what was left of his murder and when I was able to speak at all, I tried to be funny. It is impossible to foretell how a man will behave in unusual circumstances.

From my viewpoint on the balcony I could see the unhappy Persian lying lonely on the ground, spread out and absolutely at rest. A young man in a fur hat and a green Norfolk jacket was vanishing between two houses—making for a steep piece of waste ground. A semicircle of women and children was looking at the Persian and at the spot where a little black mark showed on his bald forehead. Two Tartar policemen were running towards the place, as—let us do them justice—they almost invariably did run when they heard firing. They shall have their due. From the hospital a number of British soldiers were advancing at the double with joyful outcries. I went downstairs to see if anything could be done.

When I got to the scene the crowd had closed in, and when I had pushed my way through, I saw a fat old hakim squatting by the corpse, pawing it professionally and puffing a large pipe. The Persian was very dead and there was nothing to be done, so I joined Muckle and the padre on the balcony to see the second act.

In a little while the crowd scattered and the gentleman in green came back waving a remonstrative pistol. After him came the Tartar police with their rifles trained on the small of his back. An old, bandy-legged police officer had by this time arrived with reinforcements, and he took charge. He talked to the prisoner for about ten minutes, and then shook hands with him. The police slung their arms and slouched off, and the young Tartar pocketed his pistol and walked away in the opposite direction. The women went back to their household duties and the children to their hopscotch. Peace reigned in the Nikolaivskaya Oulitza.

The Tartar was shot by the dead man's brother up behind our flat on the same afternoon.

* * * * *

Many weeks after this, I was assaulted by tic douloureux ; and, towards 4.30 in the morning, I put on my wraprascal and my balaclava helmet and went out to smoke cigarettes on the balcony.

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Franciscus presently joined me from visiting friends in the town, and we sat quiet, watching the smoky sun rise on the oily waters and the sweet morning breeze ruffle the leaves in the governor's garden.

The door of the little shop opened noiselessly and an old, bent, barefoot, veiled woman in faded blue crept out to the place where the dust had long covered the Persian's blood. She sat down on the ground and bowed her sorrowful old head ; silently for a little ; and then began to beat her withered breast and raise her hands to the sky, her whole body ashake with grief and rage. She was telling Allah about it—that we could see—but though the morning was very still we could not hear her voice.

The policeman from the road end moved slowly towards her, and presently a young man shuffled from the shop, and led her in. The policeman followed her with his lazy eyes till the door was shut. Then he turned and walked down the road. As he passed below our balcony he winked roguishly at us and tossed his thumb over his shoulder.

" Cigarette, officer ? " said the policeman, with an irresistible air of bonhomie.

CHAPTER XV

THE VISITOR'S DREAM

ONE day Scott-Liddell, who had come from Constantinople and was soon returning thither, was sitting at afternoon tea. He was a lean, serious man, becomingly bald. The afternoon was swimming in the moist Baku heat, and Amaymon had just finished telling us of a night disturbed by evil dreams.

"The most singular dream I ever heard of", said Scott-Liddell, "occurred during my delirium when I had pneumonia last summer."

He told us his dream. In a Thames-side garden he was having tea with some friends under a great apple-tree ("as it might be the five of us"), and all of a sudden he was taken with a horrible and enormous shivering, during which he fell forward among the blue china teacups, and the garden, the apple-tree, the ladies, and the river faded out of his consciousness.

He was on board ship, bound for South America. The voyage was short, but would have been tedious had not a beautiful fellow-passenger

enlivened it with long, sympathetic, and relevant conversations, the bulk and gist of which Scott-Liddell still remembers. On the last day of the voyage the beautiful lady suddenly turned on Scott-Liddell and coldly and bitterly upbraided him. When he asked for a reason she told him he knew well enough, though indeed he didn't. . . . A mad sense of injustice raged in Scott-Liddell, and as soon as he landed he plunged into the sub-tropical jungle.

For three days and nights he fought with the trailing lianas, on and on through purple darknesses, while birds of paradise flickered like fireflies to and fro above his head. "I am making a fool of myself", said Scott-Liddell at length. "I am a man of forty. I have a wife and child at home." And soon he was out in the daylight, and embarking on a ship bound for Rouen.

In France he walked many miles of long white road, and at last, in the gathering twilight, came to the wrought-iron gates of a château. He was tired ; the gate was unlatched. He went in and made his way up the avenue.

In the château he met a Greek with a bowler hat and a little ginger beard. The Greek welcomed him and showed him to his room. It was a big room with hunting tapestries and a massive curtained four-poster bed. A wash-hand

basin, very simple, stood in a far corner. A great painted armoire occupied one wall. Scott-Liddell opened the door of this, and saw three faded dresses such as were worn by the ladies of the Court of le Roi du Soleil. There was a faint odour of musk and lavender. Just then a golden note came from a far-away gong, and Scott-Liddell washed hurriedly and went downstairs.

In the long, candle-lit dining-room the three old ladies of the gowns were waiting to receive him. They were called Marie-Josephine, Marie-Cecile, and Marie-Louise. The Greek also was there, still in his rusty lounge suit and wearing his bowler hat.

The dinner was a charming meal eaten to the accompaniment of old-world courtesies and gentle compliments. At nine the old ladies withdrew, and not long after, Scott-Liddell was glad to go to bed.

In the morning he was told by the Greek that the old ladies seldom rose till after déjeuner. They were very aged, the Greek said. So Scott-Liddell amused himself by wandering along beech avenues over mossy turf. Later he paid his respects, and was entertained by duets sung in old French by Marie-Louise and Marie-Cecile, while Marie-Josephine made tinkling music on a little spinet. They dined at half-past five. So three days passed.

On Saturday night at dinner-time Scott-Liddell saw that something was toward. The old ladies were whispering and blushing with a great air of mystery, and at last, with the fish, a servant brought in a bottle of champagne and put it beside Scott-Liddell. The three old ladies beamed like frosty sunrises, and stole tiny glances at one another. At last Marie-Cecile made a sign to the Greek which seemed to indicate that she was covered with confusion, but would be glad if the Greek would explain to Scott-Liddell. The Greek leant over the table to Scott-Liddell, and the three old ladies regarded him shyly but intently.

The Greek told Scott-Liddell in French that the three old ladies took great delight in his company ; that they were lonely old bodies with no neighbours and no interests beyond their avenue gates. The Greek at this point poured Scott-Liddell a glass of champagne, and whispered in English, with a certain harsh urgency, " Drink this up quickly ! " Scott-Liddell was startled, and did as he was bid. The Greek went on gently, insistently, that the old ladies would like Scott-Liddell to stay always in the château. There was happiness in the château—peace, quiet, forgetfulness, stillness. The old ladies began urgently, like twittering field-mice, to beg him to stay with them. A vista of long peaceful similar days formed itself before Scott-Liddell, and he

smiled. "Drink this up!" whispered the Greek harshly. A life of ease in the half-light of the old world! Scott-Liddell took a long pull at the wine. It was going to his head. Another glass and he would be tipsy. He would shock the three old ladies. Perhaps . . . "Drink, drink!" said the Greek, so low that Scott-Liddell could hardly hear him; and again the soft, persuasive voice went on. Scott-Liddell drank again, mightily this time. He rose swaying to his feet and caught the bottle-neck in his fist.

"No", he said. "No! All same . . . I drink your bloody good health, mesdames!" He put the bottle to his mouth and gulped down every drop. The frightened old ladies rose in a panic and fluttered from the room. The Greek lay back in his chair, and his laugh was satanic. Liddell threw the bottle at him and went reeling out into the dusk.

He walked all night. In the green dawn he reached the coast, where a small pair-oar boat was moored. He rowed till the afternoon—till the lights were twinkling from Sheerness, up the river through the misty moonlight, and in the morning he came to the river-gate of his house by the Thames. He went up the red garden path, opened the door softly with his latchkey, crept silently upstairs, undressed, and went to bed. He was tired. He fell asleep.

" Good morning, Jim ", said his wife. She looked *real*.

The curious thing, to Scott-Liddell, was that his time sense appeared to have been unimpaired. The talk in his delirium tallied accurately with the different stages of his illness and of his dream. At one period his temperature dropped, and his pulse grew rapid like a canary's. The doctor by his bedside told his wife that all was lost. . . . " I've got a bottle of champagne ", said his wife ; " would that be any good, doctor ? " The doctor said it might, and Scott-Liddell was fed with champagne. He seemed to like it, and within twenty minutes he had finished the bottle. From that moment he rallied.

CHAPTER XVI

HOW I THREATENED A CABINET MINISTER WITH A SEVERE BEATING

AS I sat in the midst of my spies one day, a raw-boned spy with a shock of red hair and swivel eyes dashed through the doorway and cast himself prone on the silken rug at my feet.

"Master", he said, when I had permitted him to speak, "in the vaults of the Parliament House of Azerbaijan lie stores and stores and stores." He placed my boot on his head in token of fealty.

"What stores, dog?" I asked gently.

"Stores the property of the late defenders of Baku. Many of them the property of H.M. King George. Thousands of krans' worth of stores."

I gave him a playful kick on the cheek and dismissed the matter from my mind. But later it returned to my mind, and I went down to the Anglisky Stab to see a man with a red gorget, patches, and untidy hair, whose name, and even the letters of the alphabet denoting whose office,

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I have forgotten. He gave me the following instructions :

I was to go with the lady interpreter he had attached to my entourage to visit the Minister of Health, and to obtain from him a great parchment chit, sealed with the Azerbaijan seal, and signed by the Minister and by the Minister President. Armed with this chit, I was to go to the Parliament House and to present it to the Minister of the Interior, who would instruct me where to find the Minister of Fine Arts and of Public Worship and Education, who was also Lord High Custodian of the Parliament House, where he lived with his wife rent free. In his presence and with his permission I was to break Bicherakov's seal over the vaults, enter, make an inventory, and remove any British stores therein deposited.

I found the Minister of Health a friendly Russian. I found the Minister of the Interior an ill-conditioned Tartar, who took no notice of the lady interpreter or of me till I beat with a stick on his desk. He then ordered an underling to lead us to the home of the Minister of Education.

His Excellency was not in, but his wife said that he would return the following day. I suggested that he might be in that evening ; and Mrs. Excellency thereupon invited us to come

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in, and produced a samovar of tea. In a few moments His Excellency appeared. He was an exceedingly suave, slim, greasy man of anything from nineteen to fifty years of age ; he wore an astrakhan hat and a frock-coat, and, after the manner of Tartar bucks, carried a chain of amber beads round his left wrist and palm.

He talked to us of things in general and of the proposed federation of the Caucasian States. I began to talk about the stores, as it was nearly dinner-time and I was tired of his tea. He said that he regretted very much that the keys had been mislaid, and that he was not sure which room I meant, and could I tell him where it was ? He suggested that I should come at noon on the morrow, when everything would be in readiness. I said, " I want to see the room ".

When madame the interpreter had convinced him that I wanted to see the room, he bowed and led the way. There in a lofty corridor were two great doors, each bearing Bicherakov's seal.

" I am afraid ", he said, " we cannot break the seals without authority."

" I have the authority ", I said.

" Very well ", he said ; " but there is nothing in the rooms. They are quite empty. I did not know they were here, and you will find everything untouched to-morrow It is a pity we cannot

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open the door to-night, but, as you know, the keys are in an office in the town."

"The keys", I said. "Send for them."

"But", he said, "unhappily the custodian of the keys has gone to Tiflis and will not be back for a week, and he has taken the keys with him. In any case", he said, "the British took everything when they retired from Baku in disorder. I was in hiding from the Turks at the time (!), and have therefore no knowledge of or responsibility for any stores. Either the Turks or the English removed them; I do not know which. I have never been in the room. Besides, I give you my word of honour only Azerbaijan stores are in the room."

I said: "Get the key and open the door".

"I regret", he said, "that the custodian of the key and his family have got typhus and are in quarantine, and you will understand, therefore, that nobody can get the key without a requisition from the Medical Soviet. But if you call to-night I shall have the key. You will find the British stores all correct, as I myself have made a correct inventory of them, and have given instructions that they are not to be disturbed."

It was at this point I said to the interpreter:

"Madame, will you tell His Excellency that I am about to kick the door down with my boot, and that if I find anything wrong or if the stores

have been tampered with, I shall give him a severe beating? I did not come here to listen to the roor Nights."

Madame told him this with a certain amount of alacrity. He made a sign with his hand, and an aged porter came up at the double bearing a large key. His Excellency then told Madame that he had to catch a train to Petrovsk at once—and disappeared; not, I hoped, to rouse his janissaries. I opened the door.

There were no British stores, but there was a routh of Russian stores of the most useful variety. I put a seal on the door with my own right thumb and went to dinner, and that night our G.S. wagons filed up to the Parliament House and emptied the room, no man saying them nay.

And that is how I threatened a Cabinet Minister with a severe beating.

VI

BAKU FINISH

CHAPTER XVII

THIS AND THAT IN BAKU

LIFE in an English garrison town was a round of mild routine, enlivened by gossip and general chit-chat, increasing in liveliness and colour as the evening fell. The big families of boys with the jovial, ribboned, and whiskered paterfamilias came and went in each others' messes in the happiest possible spirit, and never the lotus closed, never the wild-fowl woke, but some billet incarnadined the evening air with a tremendous guest-night. If a guest-night showed signs of growing formal and austere, the P.M.C. sent round an SOS to the other battalions, where bands of subalterns were always in readiness to liven things up a bit to oblige a friend. These youths were technically known as the Villagers, and their entrance was a signal for

the commencement of Eightsome Reels, Leave Trains, Chair Polo, Rugby Football, and other parlour games. The furniture bill was very heavy, but it was no odds so long as the youths got plenty of healthy exercise. Our delight in each other's society made it difficult for those who loved soberly to study lights and shades in unusual characters to cultivate the populace as we should have liked to do. After midnight, however, we often scattered in groups to the various cafés of the town, and now and again fell in with strange rascals who provided us with new points of view.

I spoke to a poet with long hair, a tangled beard, two pairs of spectacles, a green sweater, and thigh boots. He was walking about the café writing poetry on the back of a playbill with a small, blunt pencil. I asked him what he was writing, and he gave me his poem, of which this is a translation :

I see my young countrymen dancing the Naurskœ,
Here in this place among the lights and noise,
Though the snow falls outside and it is very cold.
But within it is warm like a man's heart that beats
for joy.

My heart, which was formerly heavy, beats like that
of which I have spoken.

The Naurskœ sparkles, illuminates beauty,
And turns my thoughts to Russia !

He told me he had lived in England for one year. He had been employed there as a nihilist. He said :

“ I wanted to destroy England, but she was very kind to me. I shall write you a poem about England.”

He wrote me a poem about England. The poem said that England was Russia's foster-mother, and would lead her by the hand till she learned to walk proudly among the nations. He then told me more about England :

“ What seemed to me very épatant about England was this : Your King gave the people Hyde Park as a free gift ; and behold, every day men made speeches there saying, ‘ Down with the King ! ’ But he did not throw them into prison or turn his Cossacks on them with great whips. He only placed himself to laugh, and nothing happened. England is very gentil.”

Some nights after the British Military Police threw a young soldier of Russia into the street for some infringement of the laws of decorum. My friend was furious. He came to me with voice shaking with rage, and said :

“ I am ashamed of England ! If they had thrown me into the street, it would not have mattered. I am only a journalist. But they have thrown a HERO into the street ! ”

I had difficulty in calming him, till I thought

of the magic word "Nitchevo". When this word was spoken he composed himself, gave a sad little shrug of his shoulders, and walked off to ask the proprietor if he could have further credit.

The only English equivalents of Nitchevo are perhaps, "It will be all the same a hundred years hence", or Mr. Toots', "It's of no consequence". But these phrases have little of its magic. "C'est la guerre" was useful at one time in Picardy, but it had not a tithe of the soothing properties of "Nitchevo". It is better than "More was lost at Mohacz Field", and broader in its application. It constitutes a large part of Russian conversation.

Q. How are you ?

A. Nitchevo.

Q. The weather is very bad, is not it ?

A. Nitchevo.

Q. Have you anything to say before I sentence you to the extreme penalty of the law ?

A. Nitchevo.

Q. What are you doing in my house at 3 a.m. with my ormolu clock in your pocket ?

A. Nitchevo.

Q. Do you know that there has been an earthquake down the street, and the police are massacring the survivors ?

A. Nitchevo.

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It settles everything and satisfies everybody. Legend and I are going to have it engraved on our tombstones when we die.

HIC JACET
LEGEND
"NITCHEVO".

HIC JACET
BRIDIE
"NITCHEVO".

One night I had a chat with an officer of the Tartar Army. He was a prince. I asked him if he was a Turk, and he said, "We are no Turks or Russians, we are AZERBAIJAN. Hurrah! Gentlemen, I give you the health of the Republic".

We did not drink it, and Bileth wanted to kick him out of our box, where, indeed, he had no business to be, as no one had invited him. We restrained Bileth, and the Prince, who was flown with vodka, did not appear to be disturbed. He drank the health of the Republic himself, and sat down all smiles.

"Never mind", he said, "we may kick you out some day. But to-night we shall be friends."

He became affability itself. He showed us his kinjal or cossack dirk. It was a yard long and dented along the edge of the blade.

"Armenians", he said, succinctly, "I have killed twenty of the hound dogs, and when you have gone, I shall kill a hundred."

A little later, the band struck up the Lesginka, and the Prince took himself off and joined in

the dance with Mischa and his Cossacks. As the stamping and hand clapping grew fast and furious, we observed the Prince reaching for his Browning automatic. Now this was forbidden, this firing of *feux de joie* in public places of entertainment, and so Ayporos stood up in his box and, pointing at the Prince, shouted like a Serjeant of Guards, "Put back that pistol, you ugly little swine!"

I do not think the Prince had ever been spoken to in that fashion before. It seemed to break his heart. He stopped dancing and limped dejectedly away. Two minutes later a shot was heard. In the lavatory we found the Prince standing in front of a wash-hand basin, revolver in hand. The place was littered with broken glass. The Prince, overcome by self-contempt, had shot his reflection in the looking-glass above the basin. The military police put him out.

Of a different mould was a Georgian prince, who was a Social Democrat, an Anglophile, and a Petrograd barrister. He was rather intoxicated and had not shaved for a week, but he was a little gentleman. He said:

"I wish the British to be suzerains of the Caucasus. We shall start with Federated Caucasian States on the model of the United States of America, but with a British President and a British Army of Occupation. When Russia

knows what she is doing, we shall have a great Federation of Russian States under a Russian President—I think Kolchak, but I do not know.”

I said: “ Mr. the Prince, what you say is a day-dream. We do not wish to interfere in your politics. Our desire is tout à fait the Order. The Order all the world over ”.

He said, “ You cannot have the Order till you interfere in our politics. You must not leave the Caucasus till you have made the Order ! ”

And he thumped on the table and looked at me threateningly. He must have imagined that I had no business to attend to at home.

A man I know once attended a meeting of Denikin's Medical Staff. He was asked to speak, and drew their attention to the typhus epidemic then raging among the troops. He said that typhus was carried by vermin, and suggested that every unit should be provided with a simple home-made Serbian barrel, to destroy its tiny enemies. He drew a picture of the barrel on a blackboard, and was listened to civilly.

Then a Russian doctor said, “ Yes, yes, we know all about that, and how typhus is carried. But would not a modern disinfecter train of the type used by the Germans be much better ? ”

The man said yes, it would, but they had no such trains, and were unlikely to get them. In the meantime . . .

But another Russian doctor had risen, and was vehemently attacking the type of train proposed by his friend, and illustrating his points by rapidly drawn and highly technical drawings on the black-board. The discussion now became far above the man's head, and in an hour he went away.

Marbas and I met an officer of Denikin's staff who was more practical. He said to us :

"Russia must be governed with the stick. When we enter Petrograd in a fortnight's time, we shall apply that stick to the posteriors of our fellow-countrymen."

Marbas said : "But surely Denikin is a Liberal ?"

The officer grew red all of a sudden all over his shaven head, and hit the table with his fist just as the Georgian Prince had done. He said, "Denikin is NOT a Liberal. And even if he were a Liberal, we who fight for him are not Liberals".

Discussing measures for pacifying the country after the fall of Petrograd and Moscow, he said : "It will not be possible to kill all the Jews, but we will do our best".

Marbas said : "Why do you hate the Jews ?"

He said : "Because I am a Christian man and they killed my Saviour. All good Christians must try to exterminate the brutes. They are strong. They have captured the French Government. And the American. President Wilson is

a Jew. His name is Wolfson. A Jewish name. No. If I had a Jew within reach, and if I knew I would not be punished for it (for no Jew is worth being punished for), I would crush his life out with my two hands. You think I am a barbarian? I am not a barbarian though I am a soldier. I am graduate of the Polytechnique in Paris, and I have studied engineering in London University. I am a civilized man. But what I tell you is true ”.

Marbas and I could not believe that he was really civilized in the best sense of the term, and I could not help thinking of a pattern of civilization I had left regretfully not long before. His name was Bullfinch, and he was a London solicitor turned warrior for the preservation of old ways and old customs and old places. He had grey hair and a mild gentle face, like the White Knight's in “Alice”. I said to him in conversation, did he not think that so and so was perhaps a little of the bounder. I have never seen anyone so shocked and astonished.

“My dear old chap”, he said, “don't you realize that he's an Oxford Blue, and they are most frightfully particular whom they make Blues?”

A professor once said to me of another professor: “For him, God's in Whitehall, all's right with the world”. It is an easy attitude after all for one who has lived his life within

earshot of the murmurous sound of precedent following precedent between the mossy banks of custom. For others, who for many years had held an outpost of civilization against the assaults of the Goths, life was not so easy. Such a one was Ogier.

He was an English resident in the town, a temperamental little man, and subject to attacks of the prevailing disease of the place. This disease is called Nostroiyenya, and has no counterpart in English symptomatology. It is under the influence of this disorder that the Russian peasant fills himself with vodka, murders his grandmother, searching diligently into his own soul the while, and finishes the evening in a public shore. It is under its malign influence that the Russian novel is composed. Ogier only suffered from the subacute form and that at rare intervals. But the shadow of it hung over him.

He lived in a fine house in a mouldy quarter, and had sworn an oath that no Tartar or Bolshevik or Turk should make him leave it. In earnest whereof he had armed himself with round upon round of ammunition and bombs and revolvers and rifles. After the English left and the Bolsheviks arrived he was subjected to all manner of indignity, and nearly lost his life. But he is still there, they tell me, as sensitive, and civilized, and patriotic, and arrogant as ever.

Franciscus and I dined with him one night

It was a Baku night, and his white drill was damp with the steamy heat. There he sat with his books on shelves around him ; and the queerest books. There were Calverley, and Stephens, and Bain, and Dunsany, and Beerbohm, and George Moore, and Synge, and Mark Twain, and Dickens, and Colonel Hay, and Bramah, and Dowson, and Wilde, and Kenneth Grahame, and Cunningham Graham, and Austin Dobson, and Boswell. It was a funny library to find in Baku. After dinner we adjourned to the balcony, and Ogier read us the words that had brought him comfort many a time during his strange and lonely life.

And they shall gnaw upon a file ; and they shall flee unto the wilderness of Hepsidam, where the lion roareth, and the whangdoodle mourneth for its firstborn.

And again he read :

He shall play upon an harp of a thousand strings ; spirits of blest men made perfect.

There was a pause. Ogier's hand strayed down and patted the head of the little pariah dog he had saved from the attentions of a mob of sportive Bakuvians.

"Spirits of blest men made perfect. . . . Good-night, gentlemen."

It was a hint. Franciscus and I went home, leaving him alone with his dog.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE WAITERS

THEY wore evening-dress and answered to the name of George ; but they were not like the waiters we westerners know. They lacked the quality of smoothness. Take the less virile, the less healthy and " clean-run " characters of Dostoievski, and blend them with the Tartar, Syrian, Georgian, Turcoman, Persian, Armenian, and Greek ; dress them in seedy black, shave them once a week, wash them once a fortnight, teach them to say " Si chas " (or, in English, " Anon, anon, sir "), in the mournful tone of a fatalist awaiting execution ; and you will have compounded the waiters of Baku or as near an imitation as makes no difference. The bland gentleman who terrified me once in Prince's admits no consanguinity to these Georges. Fritz, of the pre-war Adelphi in Glasgow—whom I have seen charge a crowd of football roughs with a roar like an angry bull's, buffeting, kicking, and butting them down the rickety stairway—there is none of his Hunnish valour in their leaden eyes. And yet . . .

A personage came one day from Tiflis, and I was detailed to show him the sights. He came in a train which was a travelling hotel, and lived in it during his stay in Baku. All great ones did this. But he dined with us one night, and told Theodorus what he thought of the Armenians. His views were pungent, expressed in tense, nervous English, and inflamed with an inward glow which was one of the man's chief assets in life. He was a broad officer with hot, little grey eyes; able, eager, fierce, intolerant. Theodorus sat back on his heels and flapped his hands, and Theodorus was no craven in an argument, nor indeed in any respect. We were rather glad when *l'heure du Kazino* arrived. The Colonel had found out when this hour was, and started from his seat punctually.

"Well", he said, "let's see this Casino we hear so much about. I've arranged for my interpreter to meet me there. He's a decent little chap. I forget his damned name. You needn't mind his joining the party. He's a prince. How are we going? Phaetons? Good God!"

Our *dvornik* had brought three phaetons, and the Colonel took the cleanest after careful scrutiny, and with the air of saying to himself, "Oh, well! We're out for the evening. It doesn't matter if it snows *tarantulæ*". Away we went.

"Now, what-you-may-call yourself", said the Colonel to the Interpreter-Prince, "I've brought you here to see that we're not swindled. These swine would have the shirt off your back if you'd only sit still and let them have it."

"Oh, no, Colonel!" I exclaimed. "They are quite nice people here. They know me and treat me with the most tender consideration."

"My boy", said the Colonel. "When you are as old in the Service as I am, you will not be so ready to allow yourself to be bilked. Make yourself respected. That's the game. Put the fear of God on them. Here, interpreter, what do you make of this menu?"

The interpreter was a little sallow chap of seventeen I should think, but aged for his years. He wore brown button boots, a Norfolk jacket, and a tiny moustache. He advised vodka and salade Kazino to begin with.

"Let's have it", said the Colonel, jovially; and then allowing a faint note of menace to enter his tone, "And tell them to jump to it", he added.

"Si chas!" said the grey-head George, as he sadly took the order.

We waited five minutes; we waited ten. Bang! went the Colonel's fist on the table.

"To hell with this", said the Colonel. "Who in Heaven's name do they think we are? Go out

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and get a move on them, interpreter ! ” And then to me, “ Make them respect you, my boy. I hate making a fuss, when I ’m your guest and so forth, but they ’ll treat you like dirt if you ’re civil. ”

We waited five minutes more, and George appeared with his salad.

“ I didn ’t order this ”, said the Colonel.

“ You did, sir ”, said the interpreter.

“ I did not ! ” said the Colonel. “ Here, you, chilevik, take this damned stuff away. Bring me a sturgeon steak. Where ’s the manager ? What the hell ? ” he asked.

George gave a despairing look and fled. We waited five minutes ; we waited twenty. The Colonel explained to me that we had let down British prestige very badly in Baku, and we really must stiffen our backs a bit. He then turned to the interpreter with a roar.

“ Where is my supper ? Go and get it ”, he said.

The Prince went. We waited ten minutes. The Colonel twirled his big moustache, and thumped the table and ground his teeth, and said he had never been treated like this in his life, and who the devil was our A.P.M.

I said, “ Hold on a minute, sir, I ’ll go and see the manager ”.

He said. “ No, sit where you are. I ’ll show the swine how to treat a British officer ! ”

We waited other ten minutes. I got up. The Colonel was hungry, and he let me go.

In the corridor outside our box, a Soviet had assembled. The Georges to the number of about ten, had surrounded my pale, genteel little friend, the manager, and were telling him all about it. Farther down the corridor the Prince was making friends with one of the lady artistes who sang in the cabaret show. I joined the larger group, and the Prince, seeing me, bade his new friend adieu, and hurried to the spot.

I said, "Shto etta takoi?"

The manager explained. He said that the waiters had refused to serve my friend. If I would go into another box, they would gladly serve me, but no explanations, no supplications, no threats would induce them to cross the threshold where my Colonel sat.

"But", I said in pidgin Russian, addressing myself to the Georges, "he is an extremely big (bolshoi) officer in the Anglisky Stab. It is an international act, this of yours. I should not be a bit surprised if he ordered his guns into the Kazino, and had you all shot for lèse majesté Brittanique, and razed your cabaret-restaurant to the ground."

The Georges signified that I could hang them, nitchevo; I could shoot them, nitchevo. They could not serve that rude and violent and red-faced officer.

"Well", I said, "George, and you, too George, and all the other Georges, my heart aches. I am very sad. I have a pain. You know me as your friend?"

"Dada", said the Georges.

"I am not rich, yet have I been generous?"

"Etto pravda", said the Georges.

"You have been slow, I have spoken nothing evil. You have been dishonest, I have been always the gentleman. Have I abused or spat upon you, ever?"

"Nyett, nyett, slav' Boug", said the Georges, "but still we will not serve . . ."

"And yet, when I bring with me to the Kazino an exceedingly bolshoi officer with whom I am desirous of standing well, simply because he is nimnoshka piané (or slightly elevated by alcoholic stimulant), you . . ."

The magic word had been spoken. The Georges began to laugh. It was the first time I had heard them laugh.

"PIANÉ? Ach, tak chara sho! Nimnoshka piané? We thought he was only rude. Si chas, gospodin pot polkovnik!"

The Georges began to run. It was the first time I had ever seen them run. Then such a stream of plates loaded with viands, such an array of alert, smiling faces rushed in upon the Colonel as had never been seen before in Trans-

caucasias. They had done him an injustice. They had thought him rude when, in fact, he was drunk. They would make amends.

The Colonel was humbled by starvation. He omitted to curse them ; and indeed their assiduity was such as to smother reproach.

The Colonel, delicately munching a spring onion, turned to me :

“ There’s two very good tips you’ve learned to-night, my lad,” he said benevolently. “ Always take an interpreter, and don’t stand any nonsense from dagoes. These two tips have carried me through many a tight place. Here’s your good health ! ”

CHAPTER XIX

THE OLD WOMAN AGAIN

ALIBABAIEFF occupied the flat below ours on the Nikolaivskaya. He was a fat and morose Tartar, and none of us liked him. There was a little cellar club in Baku, called the Momus. It was originated by the artists of the town, and in it one might have supper at an enormous price, and a bright little Chauve-Souris entertainment. It was in a large underground room with Persian carpets nailed to its roof, a lurid dado of processional grotesques, and a little stage at one end with a black silk curtain, across which a huge dancing harlequin had been vividly sewn. At intervals during the interminable Russian meal, a gong struck, cymbals clashed, the lights went out, and two Chino-Persian dwarfs carrying tall candles pulled apart the curtain. A lightning comedy, or a dreary little tragedy was then played ; or someone would recite a "Romanz" to music—a dismal diversion much in vogue among the Bakuvians. As each item finished, the curtain fell, and eating and drinking were renewed. Occasionally a diner

would fish his balalaika from below the table and strike up a cossack song. An evening at the Momus was a little mannered and artificial, but the place is a pretty memory.

One night a lady with a thin, charming voice was singing a lengthy ballad of Poushkin's, about a Siberian prisoner who wandered a thousand versts in the snow, and was drowned at last in the Volga at night with the lights of his home twinkling across the water. We were listening in the pleasant *dwaum* one gets into when Russian songs are sung when, with a noise like a bursting cistern, Alibabaieff began to eat a large plate of greasy soup with bay leaves floating on its surface. With his tall French wife, he had arrived at the next table unbeknown to us, and such was our shame on realizing that he was our neighbour, that we left the Momus at once. From that date, a section of the mess regarded the Alibabaieff family with undisguised malignity.

Not so Asmodeus. Madame Alibabaieff met him one day on the stairs and asked him to tea. And for a long time afterwards Asmodeus, young Orobas, little Billee, and others went downstairs three times a week, and drank tea with the wives of the oil magnates of Baku, and held long and intellectual conversations in the French language. Bileth, Ayporos, Muckle, and I were of the opposing party. We used to look down from

our window to where our skippers and dancers and dalliers with dames sat among the teacups on the lower balcony, and our honest, homely faces were into sneers, though in our hearts there stirred the subtle fires of envy.

One day Plunkett brought me my lonely cup of afternoon tea, and I went out to the balcony to drink it. Everybody but me had gone out. I looked down to the street where I could count eighteen different nationalities lounging in the sunshine, and then to the Alibabaieff's balcony where a number of bright European dresses were fluttering round the samovar, and the cheerful sound of gabbled French floated up to me. I felt melancholy, sentimental. . . . All of a sudden I sprang smartly to attention, and felt as if I had swallowed an icicle. On the balcony, telling Madame Alibabaieff's fortune from her teacup, was an old lady in brown. Her back was towards me, and there was something familiar about that back. She turned round.

Looking straight at me through a powerful pair of spectacles was the Old Woman of the deserted London street, of the Soho Restaurant, of Milton Abbot ! I dashed through the window and threw myself, trembling, upon a settee. As I expected, in a few minutes there was a sinister knock at the door, and Plunkett brought me a note that had been handed in. It was an invitation to tea at Madame Alibabaieff's.

If the war had taught me anything, it had taught me to act rapidly in emergency. I took a piece of paper, splashed it with water from the carafe, and wrote in indelible pencil the following note :

“ Chère Madame,

Malheureusement je suis au bain à ce moment. Un autre fois je serai tres enchanté. Agreez, Madame, de mes sentiments les plus profonds. . . .”

Who can escape his destiny? Theodorus appeared a little later and asked me to dine with him at the house of the widow of a high Russian official, a kinsman of the Czar. Like a wretched snob, I went.

We waited ten minutes for our hostess while Theodorus criticized the furnishings of the room. At length she came. For the first time, I met the Old Woman face to face.

She was a delightful and accomplished old lady. She talked about everything under the sun and was gently contemptuous of everything but art and artists. The proper poise for a human being is attained by realizing that all other human beings are ridiculous, and that all other human beings are in some ways lovable. The Old Woman had reached that realization. The evening went on wings. She played most of the pianoforte score of Rubinstein's “ Demon ” to us,

with a running commentary on the principles and practice of diabolism. She asked us if we had seen a saraband, and danced one for us. "I could dance it better sixty years ago", she said. She produced a planchette and, with the aid of Father John of Kronstadt, told Theodorus all things whatsoever he had done and what he was about to do. I have never met a better informed or more friendly sorceress. I longed to ask her whether she had followed me round Africa clinging to the keel of my ship; if she had ridden the monsoon across India; if, in the heart of a dust devil, she had chased me up the banks of the Tigris; if she had run along the tops of the snow-tipped mountains of Persia, and waded the Caspian, stirring it with her besom, and finally leapt lightly from the ground to Madame Alibabaieff's balcony where I had seen her that afternoon; and all to watch over me and to see that I did not come to harm. I longed to ask her if she had forgiven and forgotten the lord in the North British Station Hotel; and to explain that I really wasn't a friend of his. But she put a spell on me and I was dumb. I told Theodorus the whole story, making it out to be a suspicion in my mind only and not an established fact. He said it was all quite possible.

She told Theodorus that I was very sympathetic, and asked him to bring me again. But

I did not go. I considered that I had rounded and completed the ring of my great adventure when I politely kissed her hand on parting that night in her house in Baku.

There is little more to tell. Soon after, I entrained with the rest of us for Batoum—that shoddy glass jewel in a golden setting. I sat there one day at a marble-topped table looking sadly over the sombre stretch of the Black Sea and drinking Turkish coffee. A Russian was drinking coffee opposite me, and we had not much to say to each other, for neither of us could talk the other's language. After a long pause—it was at twenty minutes to one—I said in a tragic voice :

“Sivodniyeh ja maladoi : zaftra ja starri.”

I do not know if this means anything, but I meant it to mean, “In a little while I shall cross the sea to my home ; I shall leave behind me my youth ”.

Whatever the words meant, the Russian understood and wept softly in the Russian fashion.

EIGHTH INTERLUDE

THE RETURN OF THE HOST

Eftsoons we journeyed to Byzantium,
And fifty tons of boxes, bales, and tents,
Blankets and litters ; costly simples packed
In crystal vials ; pennons of Geneva ;

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And brazen lamps and polished vessels rare
 Our patient Indians heaved from out the hold
 And ranged in order on the farther bank.
 And there we bade farewell to them, and they
 Raised to the sky a hearty Indian cheer,
 For they already heard the temple bells
 And saw the palm-trees of their natal soil.
 And so we bade farewell to them and went
 Over to minaretted Constantine.
 Then stood I proudly on Galata Bridge
 And said to Orobas: "This fytte is told.
 It may be we shall founder on the voyage
 That leads us westward to the Happy Isles.
 But we have heard the Blinded Cyclops roar
 And messed among the Anthropophagi,
 And ever where we went, our Seigneur COOK
 And guardian was a host of Frankish spears;
 So that the very porters did us reverence,
 And fierce magicians skipped to open doors.
 Sire Orobas, could I but write a gest
 To tell my people of our wanderings,
 Blind Homer would arise from out his grave;
 Borrow, in heaven, would bless his very soul,
 And Marco Polo, Huc, and Mungo Park
 Would go out of the business. But, alas!
 It may not be, for I am weak in cunning.
 But Orobas, when you and I become
 Sad, toiling leeches in some noisome slum
 And persons and events give us despte,
 We still shall hold remembrance of these things—
 How you and I were vagabond princes, once. . . .

CHAPTER XX

THE VISIT OF MR. ISRAEL PALEOLOGUE, OF ST. LOUIS, IN MY HOUSE IN GLASGOW

IT was because my uncle imagined us to be of the same age that he asked Mr. Israel Paleologue to call on me during his stay in Glasgow. My uncle is in many respects a man of genius, and he had underestimated my years by five or six. This was not strange, because once when he was reproached by my aunt for proposing to attend a dinner party in a black tie, he went upstairs to change into a white one ; and, mistaking the significance of the action of taking off the black tie, completed his undress and retired to bed. Again, without my aunt's knowledge, he bought a new pair of trousers from a slop-shop, and hurried to his lecture in the morning—he is a professor—leaving his elder pair hanging over the back of a chair. Five minutes later my aunt telephoned to the porter, dvornik, or janitor at the University asking him if . . . and begging him to call a cab, prevent my uncle from proceeding to his lecture, and

send him home to be properly dressed. So you see that to rob his nephew of five or six years of his life was an inadvertent act, was in my uncle's character, and was not one to excite remark.

Mr. Paleologue was a squat, well-dressed, and cleanly young Levantine Jew, an artist in black and white. He bowed stiffly from the hips as he greeted me. It was an autumnal and grey afternoon, and I was nourishing a severe cold before a well-heaped fire. Without disturbing the attitude I had achieved after long thought and experiment, I asked Mr. Paleologue if he recalled that story of Dr. Johnson with its coloratura ending— . . . and so you find me, seated at the fireside, roasting apples, and reading a history of Birmingham ; although, indeed, I was roasting only my shins, and was reading only the pages of my confused and toxic memory.

A distressed look flitted across Mr. Paleologue's fine eyes and velvety, olive-tinted forehead, and I concluded that he did not know the passage, or that he lacked the familiarity with English anecdote necessary to cap my instance with a better. As I cannot bear to see a fellow-creature shamed, I at once arose, took him by the hand, and asked him how he did. He said that he was very well, but had been troubled since his arrival in Liverpool by a short, dry cough ; not enough

to cause him anxiety, but sufficient to colour his attitude towards our beautiful country with an element of self-disgust. He assumed that the condition was due to the difference between an island climate and that of the country he had lately left.

I asked him to have a cigarette, but he refused, because he feared it might excite his cough, from which he had enjoyed freedom for several hours. We were silent for a little while, and Mr. Paleologue's eye strayed to an etching by Polecatch which hangs above my mantelpiece, always a little off the plumb level, for my servant has no sense of relative planes, and could sit for hours among pictures varying by ten or twelve degrees from the horizontal without experiencing the smallest discomfort. To any man with a disposition to travel and see strange countries I should give the advice that he employ a servant who is unable (within several degrees) to distinguish the horizontal in picture frames ; for it is a physio-psychological fact that such an one is never sea-sick. It is a horrible thing to have a sick servant on a sea voyage. One's life is more adorned by a white elephant, a deserted baby left in one's arms in a railway station, a whitlow, a hastily packed dress-suit of which one has forgotten the waistcoat.

No, I said to Mr. Paleologue's unspoken re-

mark, I prefer Polecatch's earlier manner to the limp eburnation of his later prints. Meunier said to me once over a grenadine in the Brazil, *Tout passe; et par exemple Polecatch*. That was many years ago, but I cannot almost help feeling that Meunier has been justified by the dark march of time. I should like, I went on, to institute a bureau for the purpose of informing artists and others of the correct moment at which to die. I should extend the activities of the bureau farther, and suggest to our clients the correct manner in which to die. How gracious a death, how charmingly appropriate if Mr. Joseph C. Squirrell had perished of prussic acid in the stage box, in the twenty-first year of his age, during a performance of *Tristan and Isolde*! And I never look at *The Duke of* —— without wishing that ten years ago he had insulted a gang of hooligans in some murky pend in Whitechapel and been kicked to death for it."

Your suggestion, said Mr. Paleologue, bears practical difficulties behind it, like some wretched Pera puppy pi-dog with an orchestra of tin cans attached by gamins to its tail. In the first place, no man is so humble that he does not believe himself able to die without advice. Exhortations, the repetition of formulæ, entertaining anecdotes, the assurance that he will have another chance in another world to play the fool—these

he can bear to hear when the shadows close upon him. But advice ! No ! It is on the death-bed that most of us hope to give full and final expression to our Personality. To express one's self ; that is to be glorious in life and to conquer, or at least to make a demonstration at, the gates of the Tomb themselves.

Mr. Paleologue, I replied, I find myself so terribly in disagreement with you that it may well take this night, and even many other nights, to find a common plane upon which we may discuss our several philosophies. But tell me, do I understand you to uphold the dogma asserted by our great thinker, Beaverbrook, that in this world Personality is Everything ?

Most certainly I do, said Mr. Paleologue. In life, in politics, in art, in letters, in music, and in the drama, Personality is Everything."

He said A'Y-VERRHY-TING very loudly, and thumped his extended palm with his clenched hand.

You may add religion, domestic economy, golf, and the selling of soft goods, Mr. Paleologue, I said, conveying to Mr. Paleologue by a slight chill in the cordiality of my tone that I intended to be ironical, and that he must place himself upon his guard.

I may and do add all these activities, said Mr. Paleologue stoutly. I had thought

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the axiom shared and subscribed to by all modern men. Mankind progresses whither the great personalities lead.

Please look for a moment, Mr. Paleologue, at that little snouted gnome who smiles at us from between the chinks of the burning coal, I said. He might have been carved with pain and labour to decorate some Belgian house of prayer, and here he is, made for us in a moment by an accident of combustion.

We looked at the fire-fashioned gnome for some minutes with great pleasure, and Mr. Paleologue even pushed a glowing cinder into his gaping mouth with the point of the poker.

There, I feed you, poor hungry one, said Mr. Paleologue, and gave a great laugh.

Now he's gone, I said. In your act of charity you have destroyed him. Was it malice, Mr. Paleologue, I asked, called forth by the thought that accident could produce a work of art? Or did you, like a woman, impel destruction with love and good intention?

Like a Jew, you should say, said Mr. Paleologue; and we disputed with each other whether or no Jews destroy the Christian State from love and good intention.

Now, look here, Mr. Paleologue, I said, when I put on my great boots and, taking a rattan in my fist, go walking on the footway,

if I meet a Jew I thrust him into the gutter, and there he sits with sorrow (like Constance) until I have passed. Yet before I end my walk another burly fellow has met me, and we have jostled, come to blows, and the pox is in it if we do not end in quod. Then the Jew rises from the gutter, smooths his gaberdine, and has the footway to himself. His is the doctrine of the Survival of Those who Bend. It is in virtue of this doctrine that to-day Joseph governs all Hindoostan, while Pharaoh drives a donkey, and cries, Baksheesh! To Christians he intends nothing at all; nor, indeed, regards them. And to return to the remark before last, I cannot conceive how a fellow of your race can ascribe to what you call Personality any influence at all in the conduct of human affairs.

We discussed for thirty-five minutes the influence of personality on the conduct of human affairs. Towards the end of that time I found myself expressing a view I have for a long time held, that Gauguin was but a maniac. This led to a quiet quarrel on the question of what constitutes an artist. Mr. Israel Paleologue and I dissolved the artist into his elements, paid tribute to the value of intuition—the perfect collaboration of head, eye, and arm, facility of emotional response and what not—and then all of a sudden we decided that the essential quality of an artist

was that he should make things ; and that even if he was only painting a canvas panel—we agreed that this was the lowest form of art—the quality of artisanship, the perfect fitting of part to part, the preconceived, predetermined certainty of line and mass should be there ; and that, if it were not there, if the picture were ever so striking a clutter of translated emotions, the painter was not an artist, and the picture was not a work of art.

We left the subject by easy graduations, and talked of the East, and why mankind should have chosen such an unpromising birthplace. We reviewed peoples and skies and seas and towns and plants and birds and beasts, and ever and anon fell into argument again, chiefly on subjects connected with Mr. Paleologue's trade.

Mr. Paleologue, I said, this is a most wonderful conversation. I shall write it down some day and have it printed. But as it will probably read like nonsense, I shall take pains to have it printed in such a way that it will be almost unreadable. He asked how that could be done, and I assured him that it would be very easy, but I did not tell him how I should do it. Instead I asked which of our English authors he found most difficult to read.

I was born in St. Petersburg, he said, where my father, who lived in Smyrna, was visiting

my aunt ; and it was in St. Petersburg that I spent my childhood till I was fourteen. Therefore I spent most of my youth in black ignorance of the glories of English literature. Even a Russian of the lower classes was not allowed to learn, and to a Jew it was impossible. I had therefore to be content with only the most superficial knowledge of your Darwin, your Lorbyron, your Oscavilde, your Gibbon, your Shelley, your Konandoyle, your William Ramsay, or your Dickens. Vells was only a name to me. It is hard for you to conceive it, here where your poorest peasant has free access to the glories of a liberal education. It was only when I went to America that I learned thoroughly to know and love your great authors. I have found none of them unreadable except your Robert Burns, whose English is a little difficult.

It was nearly seven o'clock, and I did not wish Mr. Paleologue to wait for dinner. I threw out a shower of hints till at last he felt that it was time for him to be gone.

I have enjoyed very much our talk about art, he said, and now I wish you to see some of my drawings.

For half an hour he attempted to sell me a drawing. But by this I was taken with what Falstaff had read of in Galen—a kind of lethargy ; a kind of sleeping in the blood ; a

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whoreson tingling. I fell into the disease of not listening, the malady of not marking. I showed Mr. Paleologue out, speaking conventional phrases, smiling conventional smiles; but my thoughts were on hare soup, pork chops and apple sauce, celery, Stilton cheese, coffee, and a cigarette.

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